Cricket County Championship

Title glory for the wizards of Wales

Vic Marks

IN THE GLOAMING Glamorgan won their first championship title for 28 years. To the delight of hordes of Welshmen in Taunton they completely outplayed Somerset over three days, winning the match by 10 wickets and netting £70,000 in prize money for their season's efforts.

There were minor inconveniences along the way: they were angry at Surrey's first-day performance in Canterbury, and late last Sunday afternoon they were delayed by a flamboyant eighth wicket partnership of 95 between Graham Rose and Andy Caddick, which required them to bat a second time.

But at 6.20pm, when Steve James clipped a boundary to fine leg to reach the 10 runs needed for victory, the celebrations began in earnest. (Somerset 252 and 285; Glamorgan 527 and 11-0).

Matthew Maynard's side are worthy champions. They have played with passion and purpose, and their strength stems from a hardy band of homegrown players. Waqar Younis has proven a wonderful investment, although their hero at the end was a native paceman, young Darren Thomas, whose five wickets were the catalyst for Glamorgan's victory in a frenetic, action-packed finale to the season.

Their supporters had flocked over the Severn Bridge and infiltrated every corner of the County Ground, in particular the members' enclosure. When Hugh Morris and Robert Croft strode out to resume the Glamorgan innings they received a standing ovation from everyone around the pavilion.

The crowd started to cheer every run. After a while this became too exhausting; such was the glut of runs that soon they rose only for boundaries. In 30 overs Glamorgan's last six wickets clobbered another 174 runs, which gave them a first-innings lead of 275.

Morris hit most of those early fours. After a mid-season lull this proud Welshman has responded with typical devotion to Glamorgan's cause. Inevitably he was overshadowed by Maynard's pyrotechnics earlier, but his 165 was still vintage stuff.

This may be Morris's last match for Glamorgan. He is one of five candidates vying to replace Mickey Stewart as the English Cricket Board's director of coaching and excellence.

Croft also made merry, making 86. He took particular delight in the rare off-spin of Burns, cracking him for three sixes in an over. Adrian Shaw hit his first half-century of the season and was especially severe on debutant Ben Trott, who had the consolation of picking up three wickets, all caught from heaves.

The Somerset innings also started with a flurry of boundaries off Younis, whose opening three-over spell yielded 38 runs. Most of them came from the middle of Rob Turner's bat. It was a perfect pitch and by day three there was turn enough for the spinner provided you had one (Glamorgan had two, Somerset none, and year after year a balanced side wins the title).

Younis was replaced by Thomas, who produced a far more potent spell. In his second over Turner missed a fast full-length delivery, and soon after Piran Holloway nibbled fatally outside the off-stump to give Shaw a straightforward catch. This was Thomas's fiftieth wicket of the season. Patience has now been allied to passion and pace.

Glamorgan were on track, but soon there were signs of tension. A few chances went begging. Simon Ecclestone, out of sorts, gave two of them, but could not capitalise. A rash drive against Steve Watkin was safely held by Morris at first slip and the celebrations recommenced.

However, Mark Lathwell offered stouter resistance, finally finding his best form of the season in late September. Marcus Trescothick was less secure. He survived half-chances, ballooning the ball over James at silly point and edging Younis down the leg side, but Shaw could not hold on. No matter. Just before tea Trescothick prodded forward to Croft and offered James an undroppable catch at forward short leg.

After the break Thomas bowled superbly. He produced a beauty to bowl Lathwell, then dispatched Peter Bowler and Burns in swift succession. For 14 overs Rose, who struck the ball majestically for 67, and Caddick refused to accept the inevitable, but once Rose was stunned to be adjudged caught behind, the Welshmen abroad began to clear their throats.

● Steve James, Glamorgan's big-hitting opening batsman, was named the Player of the Year by his fellow county cricketers. James scored nearly 1,800 runs this season. Ben Hollioake, the 19-year-old Surrey all-rounder, took the honours for the Young Player, and Lord Cowdrey received a special merit award for his achievement in cricket. Peter Willey was named top umpire.

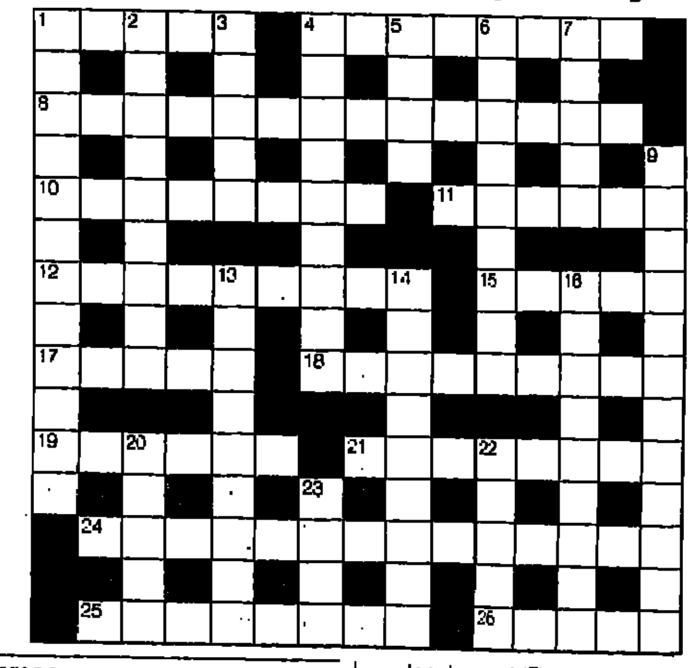


Winners are grinners . . . Glamorgan players get the party started as fans gather at Taunton PHOTOGRAPH: WINSTON BYNORTH

Final County Championship table

	P	W	L	D	Pts
Glamorgan (10)	17	8	2	7	256
Kent (4)	17	8	4	5	252
Worcestershire (7)	17	6	3	8	228
Middlesex (9)	17	7	4	6	219
Warwickshire (8)	17	7	2	8	219
Yorkshire (6)	17	6	3	8	215
Gloucs (13)	17	6	6	5	208
Surrey (3)	17	5	5	7	192
Essex (5)	17	5	6	6	192
Leicestershire (1)	17	4	1	12	191
Lancashire (15)	17	5	6	6	186
Somerset (11)	17	3	3	11	183
Notts (17)	17	4	3	10	175
Hampshire (14)	17	3	5	9	158
Northants (16)	17	3	5	9	156
Derbyshire (2)	17	2	9	6	141
Durham (18)	17	2	8	7	131
Sussex (12)	17	1	10	6	118

Cryptic crossword *by Fawley*



Across

1 Wood from Spain, like 26? (5)
4 Legislation passed to control shooting clubs (4, 4)
8 Various material assembled, giving blanket coverage (9, 5)
10 Bread deliveries — a lot of bread! (8)
11 Gives Eastenders' woman little congratulation — said to be a poor performer (6)
12 Where change is made in the current legal system (5,4)
15 Alternatively, child may be given film star's name (5)
17 Obscure character retains good legal expert (5)
18 Oppressive tax meant to last? (5-4)
19 Forceful, firm and well-connected bloke (6)
21 Fellow in a rush, excited by gold, married German woman (8)
24 Machine incapacitated by outlaw (3-5,6)
25 Quietly, skilled worker becomes devoted to a cause (8)
26 Iron spirit — backbone? (5)

Down

1 Old flame left on plane, touring about — one stays in this country (6,6)
2 Beaten by skill and exposed — drama's involved (9)
3 Tearaway comes in to play a hoodlum (5)
4 World search for natural swimmers (9)
5 An announcer using common parlance? (4)
6 Double up with a politician, offering praise (9)
7 Take steps to find soundtrack of Disney's (5)
9 Start to bake in heat, beginning to burn, say — a treat for 23? (6,6)
13 Secretly prepare to tackle a story, one I want sensationalised (3,2,4)
14 Great Dane lolloping about in feeding area (3,6)
16 The gentry perhaps show embarrassment about poem sent up (9)
20 Italian community needs info on blood groups (5)
22 Rod represents the workers (5)
23 Occasion for kiss when under mistletoe — only the first! (4)

Last week's solution

M O U B
MIASMA SPREAD
O R A D P W A
AZORES OPERATIC
A I U N R I N
ARIA MAGICFLUTE
T G I U Y
SELFCONTROL
P A V C A
GOLDENCALF COSI
S E T N I I P
LEFTTURN GODWIT
U A T I A E R
RECITE FRANCE
H E O T

Motor Racing

Villeneuve win opens up the race

Alan Henry at Zeltweg

JACQUES VILLENEUVE brought the 1998 world championship back to life last Sunday with a superbly judged victory in the first Austrian Grand Prix in a decade.

With three races and 30 points to compete for, he trails Ferrari's Michael Schumacher — who was lucky to salvage sixth place after a disastrous race — by a single point as the teams move on to the Nurburgring for Sunday's Luxembourg Grand Prix.

Villeneuve took the lead on the new A1-Ring circuit after 44 of the race's 71 laps and drove with great restraint and discipline to take the chequered flag 2.9sec ahead of David Coulthard. Heinz-Harald Frentzen brought the other Williams home third to consolidate the British team's lead in the constructors' championship.

Schumacher had a bad result for the second successive race. Having qualified his Ferrari a lowly ninth, he battled his way up into the top three and led for two laps before making his sole refuelling stop on lap 42.

He resumed in third place but then had to come into the pits for a 10-second stop-go penalty after overtaking Frentzen at the uphill right-hand Remus Kurve when yellow flags were being waved after a collision between Eddie Irvine's Ferrari and the Benetton of Jean Alesi.

In the closing stages Schumacher piled on the pressure to overtake Damon Hill's Arrows Yamaha, but it was too much to expect his brother Ralf, running fifth ahead of him in the Jordan, to relinquish his place and hand him another championship point, so he had to be content with sixth.

Villeneuve made a poor start from pole position, dropping to fourth place as Mika Hakkinen's McLaren-Mercedes surged away for an early lead. The Finnish driver's bad luck was riding with him again, and by the end of the opening lap he was already pulling his car up on to the grass, where he retired with engine failure.

Hakkinen's misfortune allowed Jarno Trulli, the young Italian driving in his 14th grand prix, to surge ahead in his Prost Mugen Honda. With his soft-compound tyres offering superb grip, the 22-year-old prodigy from Pescara drove away from Rubens Barrichello's Stewart-Ford and Villeneuve with a confidence which endorsed him as one of Formula One's most promising drivers.

Villeneuve whittled down Trulli's advantage, vaulting ahead of the Prost at their refuelling stops. Trulli held on to second place before his Mugen Honda engine expired in a cloud of smoke 13 laps from the chequered flag. This allowed Frentzen through to third place ahead of Giancarlo Fisichella's Jordan.

The most disappointing performance came from the only Austrian in the race, Gerhard Berger, who started his Benetton from the pit lane and ended up spinning off into a gravel trap.

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The Washington Post · Le Monde



Drought and smog bring Asian misery

John Aglionby in Yogyakarta, Indonesia

MOEDRICK does not smash rocks out of choice, it is just that he has to try to make ends meet. In most years at the end of September this farmer from central Java would have been preparing to harvest his rice crop. But this year is different.

Instead of having two acres of lush green paddy field at the back of his house, the 38-year-old father of three looks out on a barren grey dust bowl. Almost three-quarters of his crop has failed and what remains has a jaundiced tinge to it.

The problem is simple: no water. The polluted haze caused by huge forest fires in Sumatra and Kalimantan which are choking much of southeast Asia has attracted global attention. It has also obscured the fact that tens of millions of people elsewhere in Indonesia are enduring the worst drought in more than 50 years.

More than 270 people have died from drought-related causes in Irian Jaya, the Indonesian half of New Guinea. But it is in the heartlands of Java, where most of the country's staple foods are grown, that the effects of eight months without rain are starting to bite hardest. It is also here that the long-term economic impact will be greatest.

There are up to 2,000 farmers on each square kilometre in central Java. All are struggling to maintain a precarious existence and few earn much more than the minimum wage of about $48 a month. "Even with the extra money I earn from smashing rocks, my income this year will be down by about 60 per cent," Moedrick said.

People in Moedrick's district of Boyolali, about 50km north of the royal city of Yogyakarta, are lucky. There is still a semi-stagnant trickle running through a few rivers in the area and some wells have not yet dried up. However, Moedrick said, they would all be dry within a month unless it started raining. He will probably have to start looking for an alternative water source as no prolonged rain has been forecast to arrive until December.

Thirty kilometres south of Yogyakarta, in the hill district of Gunungkidul, the situation is much worse. Water is piped from one remaining natural spring to homes in the immediate vicinity, and tankers use dried-up riverbeds to transport water to central dispensing points in other subdistricts.

Heri Rudianto lives nowhere near the pipes or the tankers' routes. "I have to walk a couple of kilometres every time I want a drink," he said. "It's all very well the authorities saying the drought is not causing problems, but they don't have to live here. We rarely wash our clothes and always share bathing water."

The head of the state logistics agency, Beddu Amang, said last week that Indonesia was coping with the drought, that rice stocks were sufficient, and prices were stable.

The reality is different. In Boyolali town market, Desy Arianawati said the price of rice had risen more than 20 per cent in the past three weeks and sweetcorn was 25 per cent more expensive. "It is true fruit is still the same price, but the quality is much lower," she said. "Farmers are afraid that if they do not pick and sell their fruit now it will wilt and be worthless, so we are all having to eat unripe bananas and papaya."

To try to beat the drought some farmers are growing crops, such as maize and cassava, that need less water. But even these are only half the height they should be, and Mrs Arianawati said they rarely produce good quality food. "The reality is that we have enough water to stop us from falling sick, but that's it," she said. "Millions of people around here need water to earn a living and it just isn't available."

Dr Loekman Sutriano, the head of rural and regional studies at Yogyakarta's Gajah Mada University, says a national poverty crisis is a real possibility. "Millions of people, many of whom are already teetering on the brink, are likely to have major financial problems next year. And it's not happening just in Java. In Kalimantan, Sulawesi and elsewhere the situation is just as bad."

Government ministers say El Niño, the disruption of ocean currents in the tropical Pacific that causes sea temperatures to rise, is to blame for the drought. "But that's little comfort to those who are suffering," Dr Sutrisno said. "Knowing that El Niño ruined your crops won't pay next year's bills."

Meanwhile weeks of prayers asking for wind and rain to clear the choking toxic haze in Borneo and Malaysia were finally answered on Monday, but the polluted smog remained as thick as ever elsewhere in southeast Asia, prompting many foreigners to flee.

Life returned to near normal for the first time in weeks in Kuching, in the Malaysian half of Borneo, and the air pollutant index dropped by almost one-third in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, after a torrential downpour.

In Sumatra, the haze remained as thick as ever. Conditions are not expected to improve until November.

Crash kills 234, page 4
Comment, page 12
El Niño effect, page 25

A clean environment protester makes her point in Kuala Lumpur as alarm about the smog grows PHOTOGRAPH: MARK FALLANDER

Taliban 'sorry' for arrest of EU's Bonino

Martin Walker in Brussels

EMMA BONINO, the European Union's commissioner for humanitarian aid, was released with apologies after she and her party of EU officials, journalists and television crews were detained for three hours in the Afghan capital, Kabul, on Monday. Taliban authorities arrested them for taking unauthorised pictures of women in a clinic.

On a brisk 28-hour mission to review the progress of the EU's $37 million aid effort in the war-battered country, now largely controlled by the fundamentalist Islamic Taliban movement, Ms Bonino was taken to a police station at gunpoint. She claimed some of her party had been beaten with gun butts.

The European Commission president's office sought to play down the incident, with Jacques Santer's spokesman suggesting that it might all have been "a misunderstanding".

In arresting Ms Bonino and the CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour, the Taliban had taken on two of the more media-wise women to have brought Western publicity and gender values to a tense and militarised society.

There was also a sobering lesson for Brussels, which suddenly learned the impotence of an EU trying to run a foreign and aid policy without embassies or diplomatic staff, despite being the largest single aid donor to Afghanistan.

It was the third time the charismatic Italian politician has been arrested in her career. Before her appointment as EU commissioner, Ms Bonino was arrested in Italy for running an unauthorised abortion clinic. She was later arrested in New York for handing out free sterilised needles to drug addicts.

Swiss back drug handouts to heroin addicts

THE Swiss people this week overwhelmingly backed a government scheme that gives regular doses of heroin — sometimes free — to addicts, *writes Owen Bennett Jones in Geneva*. Early results of a referendum on the issue showed that 70 per cent of the electorate supports the scheme.

Government officials immediately signalled that they might expand the programme, which at present only covers long-term addicts who have repeatedly tried and failed to give up.

"The population recognises these successes of the drugs policy over the last few years," said Thomas Zeltner, director of the Swiss federal health agency. "We can now continue in this direction, building up the policy."

Opponents of the government scheme were dismayed by the scale of their defeat. To force a referendum, the organisers of the "Youth Without Drugs" campaign — who argued that the state should concentrate on repressing drugs — had had to gather 100,000 signatures.

Condemning Switzerland as the "drug island of Europe", advocates of restrictions argued that the liberal approach encouraged young people to experiment with drugs and get hooked.

"The target has to be clear — we must create human beings who are drug-free," said Walter Frey, a member of parliament for the rightwing Swiss People's party. "You can't fight drugs by giving them away free."

Many Swiss cities have areas where young people inject themselves in full public view. The government has tried to put an end to such open drug-taking, but has been unable to do so.

Results of the government programme, which has already been under way for three years, show that crime levels among registered addicts have fallen by 60 per cent. Researchers also claim that addicts on the scheme cost the state $30 a day less than those on the streets.

● Britain's Independent on Sunday called for the decriminalisation of cannabis at the weekend. The newspaper's stance was backed by 100 prominent figures from arts and business, as well as leading policemen.

Austria	AS30	Malta	50c
Belgium	BF80	Netherlands	G 5
Denmark	DK16	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 13	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 450	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,500	Switzerland	SF 3.80

Boomers' economic boom costs others dear

MARTIN WALKER'S comments on the United States economy may puzzle some readers (Bye, bye boomers, hello Brussels, September 14). In one part of this article he trots out an impressive array of (government) statistics showing low unemployment, high incomes and frenetic technological innovation. Yet he notes that the US is "busily re-creating an eerily Victorian social system" with an ominously large underclass, something one would hardly expect from such a supposedly burgeoning economy.

A few of us might sense a little inconsistency here but, on the other hand, might not this inconsistency be only apparent, an example rather of the American genius for re-inventing, which Mr Walker so strongly commends in his article — in this case, the re-inventing of reality itself?
Gordon M Sites,
Chiba City, Japan

MARTIN WALKER correctly compares the United States to the Roman and British empires, but fails to bring it up to date. The US in recent times has expanded its empire from a purely territorial one, following the Spanish-American war, to an economic one embracing much of the globe. Ask any Latin American peasant who benefits from multinational investment in his/her country.

Washington no longer needs to fund rebellions (Nicaragua) or assassinations (Chile). Now, it uses its influence in the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation to suck the lifeblood out of Third World and other countries.

Canadians are now waking up to the fact that their government sold out its sovereignty when it signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta). At present, the US and the European Union are secretly developing what cynics might say is a more totalitarian model to control the world. The Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) is the ultimate weapon of the former colonial powers to pillage resources and use cheap labour to make goods for people in the homelands of the new global empire.

Mr Walker evidently fails to understand that the recent economic success of the US is dependent on global exploitation of a far more sinister kind than the Romans and the British used in their times.
Edmund Cutler,
Christchurch, New Zealand

I HAVE enjoyed Martin Walker's interesting reports from the United States for several years. However, my reaction to his final one was: how much of the change and dynamism portrayed was at the expense of many other countries and peoples? The US with a small percentage of the world's population uses a very great proportion of its finite resources and makes a big contribution to the degradation of the global environment. And with barely 50 per cent of those eligible voting, it can scarcely be described as an exemplary democracy.
C Neville Smith,
St John's, Newfoundland, Canada

MARTIN WALKER'S swan song reached a crescendo of statistics, all reporting on a seeming miracle of abundant economic progress. In a country where 1 per cent of the people owns 90 per cent of the wealth and the rich have been getting richer compared with the poor for a generation (according to a study by the US Federal Reserve and the Internal Revenue Service), one wonders how long Social Darwinism can be used to justify economic injustice.
Michael Hogan,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

HOW I wish that I lived in the country that Martin Walker describes!
Chet Gottfried,
Sayville, New York, USA

Uncharitable criticism

IN THE aftermath of the death of Mother Teresa, some have questioned the usefulness of charitable acts by her and those like her when poverty and suffering so abound in our world. Two articles in your issue of September 14 prompt my writing: the so-called "Appreciation" by Madeleine Bunting (Canny icon rooted in a bygone era) and the letter by Paul Laverty.

Ms Bunting critically addressed the charitable work of Mother Teresa in the context of the misgivings of various safely anonymous "others" — aid workers, journalists and politicians — who wondered why she didn't devote more time to promoting world solutions to poverty. Nowhere did she quote the reactions of those thousands of individual human beings whose lives were often dramatically affected by her compassion and practical touch.

Mr Laverty wrote her off as "in the long run utterly irrelevant to the 35,000 innocents who die each day because we live in a world which violently rejects any notion of sharing wealth in a more equitable manner". How odd to label as "irrelevant" someone who without doubt fully accepted the sharing of wealth, giving away all she had including time, energy and compassion, to the immediate and practical benefit of thousands of others.

Corporate capitalism and totalitarianism both promote the belief that the individual and her/his actions are of no consequence — that only the large and the powerful matter. Mother Teresa's life was a challenge to that ideology. She made a *choice* to be significant in renouncing wealth and giving her resources — time, patience, humility — feeding, sheltering, and washing the excrement off the bodies of people left abandoned and unattended by the rest of us.
Donald C Hedges,
New Westminster, BC, Canada

THE USE of the word "appreciation" to head Madeleine Bunting's obituary of Mother Teresa is canny indeed, damning cunningly as it does with faint praise. According to the writer and the unnamed "many" who "discreetly", "privately", "in private" criticised her, Mother Teresa failed. She failed to be a good, left-liberal feminist with a degree in sociology and a bust of Karl Marx on her mantle.

The most vicious accusation made by Bunting is that Mother Teresa "kept aloof". This of the woman who had feet like nothing else on earth from tramping the pavements of Calcutta and dragging dying, scabbed outcasts back to her mission.
Alexander Maidan,
Toronto, Canada

Morality and the minefields

I AM so glad that the United States was not cajoled into signing a watered-down version of the treaty on anti-personnel mines (US pulls out of ban on land-mines, September 28). This way nothing waters down the world's opinion of their callousness towards the suffering millions whose lives are blighted by mines. Surely, this kind of decision demands an outcry of US public opinion against the prolonging of such butchery.
Peter Scott,
Elora, Ontario, Canada

YOUR article "Shalikashvili defends 'smart' mines" (September 7) hardly came as a shock. Canada, of course, is very keen to be seen as the country spearheading the ban on the use, production and export of antipersonnel land-mines. Any initiative likely to produce a pat on the head from the international community makes Ottawa salivate with pleasure.

Imagine my surprise, therefore, to read in my local Canadian newspaper, not a week later, that Canada had decided to award General John Shalikashvili, thorn in the side of the Ottawa Accord, the Meritorious Service Cross.

Gen Shalikashvili is only the 15th non-Canadian to receive this distinguished honour. In the words of our governor general, Romeo Leblanc, he won it for "a military deed or activity that has been performed in an outstandingly professional manner" for his assistance to Canadian peace-keepers during their ill-fated mission to Somalia.

What a wonderful country Canada is, pouring accolades on those who would strip us of our own!
Peter Verner,
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Going public on privatisation

I WAS somewhat put-off by the patronising tone of Mark Milner's article (Air France brings privatisation crisis to a head, September 14). What gives Mr Milner the right to assume that everything has to be privatised in today's world and that resisting corporate rule is futile? These are political decisions as much as economic ones.

Maintaining state ownership of some key industries is not necessarily a bad idea, corporate media propaganda to the contrary. Not only is there nothing wrong with setting social goals for industry (as I would think UK rail passengers would agree with these days) but also state corporations can be competitive world players in today's market.

Here in Canada the socialist government of Saskatchewan recently brought key academic and business players together to review the fate of crown corporations and decided that they are an important asset to the people of the province. SaskTel, the province's small state-owned telecommunications company, is one of the world leaders in several aspects of the telecommunications field. State business can be financially successful and operated in the public interest — you just need the political will to do so.
John Richmond,
Toronto, Canada

Briefly

IN MY spells of work in Africa, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, I had seen and treated malaria with little thought as to the ramifications of the condition (August 31). A new appreciation was forced upon me when the condition hit me 18 months ago. After six months of near-paralysing weariness, the full effects were manifest. Between attacks now, energy levels are low and a full day's work is a challenge.

That parents must watch their children waste and die, or children see their parents struggle to provide despite the debility of malaria is a thought untenable in this era. One presumes that anti-malaria research funding will increase exponentially once the condition vents its full force in the First World.
(Dr) Geoffrey Cohn,
Sydney, Australia

WHY IS electoral reform always assumed to mean a switch to some form of proportional representation (September 21)? Instead of adopting PR, which is widely accepted to lead to weak government and shifting pacts, we could greatly improve the electoral system with a much simpler change. Electing MPs by single transferable vote instead of by the first-past-the-post system would remove any need for tactical voting and allow electors to vote for the candidate they really prefer; they need never fear that their vote will be wasted, and they can always vote positively instead of merely trying to ensure that a candidate they dislike is not elected.
Steve Babbage,
Newbury, Berkshire

PAUL EVANS (September 14) might be interested to know that the release of RHD in Australia was originally presumed to be an accidental event, not a deliberate one. Earlier this year in New Zealand, the ministry of agriculture refused a request to introduce the virus. However, the virus was recently deliberately and illegally brought into the country by farmers. The ministry then decided to accept the reality and to spread the disease.
(Dr) Martin N Foggo,
Lower Hutt, New Zealand

I'D LIKE to commission the Chapman brothers to attach a plastic penis to the head of the "artist" who produced the portrait of Myra Hindley, before asking Damien Hirst to pop him in a tank of formaldehyde (September 28). However, as I'm not a Conservative-supporting marketing guru, I doubt they'll jump at the idea of this new work. But, hey, at least as an idea it won't be commodified by the art world in order to make them all a few more quid.
Graeme Chesters,
Morecambe, Lancashire

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Life terms deal blow to Mafia

John Hooper in Rome

A PANEL of judges in the Sicilian town of Caltanisetta last week rang down the curtain on one of the most shameful, yet decisive, events in Italy's recent history when they gave out 24 life sentences for the killing of the man who first prised open Cosa Nostra.

The anti-Mafia prosecutor Giovanni Falcone died five years ago when a massive bomb planted under a motorway near Palermo was detonated as his car sped over it. His wife and three bodyguards were also blown to pieces.

Among those convicted of the assassination was Salvatore Riina, the Mafia's "boss of all the bosses". Riina was the most notable victim of the clampdown that followed the murder of Falcone and of his close associate Paolo Borsellino two months later.

Falcone's movements were kept so secret his murder could probably have been organised only with help from within government. It set off a wave of public indignation against politicians that not only spurred the authorities into belated action but also played a role in the fall of Italy's old order.

The sentencing was hailed by the prosecutor, Luca Pescardi, as "an historic verdict which closes an historic trial". It was reached after 25 days of deliberation by a team of seven judges.

Those receiving life sentences included three of the men police suspect may have taken command of Cosa Nostra's operations after Riina's arrest — Leoluca Bagarella, Pietro Aglieri and the ageing Bernardo Provenzano, who remains at large. The court ordered that all those in custody should be put in solitary confinement and deprived of family visits for 18 months.

Nine of the defendants were acquitted and six mafiosi who co-operated with prosecutors were given more lenient sentences. They included Giovanni Brusca, a former Riina lieutenant who has said he pushed the button on the remote control device that killed Falcone.

Despite his testimony Brusca has been refused a place in the witness protection programme. Most anti-Mafia prosecutors are convinced his true aim is to undermine the credibility of other *pentiti* (supergrasses).

Their contribution to the fight against Cosa Nostra is Falcone's most enduring legacy. It was he who nurtured and encouraged the collaboration of Tommaso Buscetta, the first Mafia boss to break the organisation's law of silence.

A grieving woman is comforted while relatives search among the dead after the massacre in Barnki, an eastern suburb of Algiers, in which at least 200 people died PHOTOGRAPH: HOCINE/AFP

Killers heighten Algeria terror

David Hirst and agencies

ALGERIA is a country in the grip of terror. In the past three months as many as 1,800 civilians have been murdered — many brutally burned, disembowelled or having their throats slit within a few kilometres of the capital, Algiers. In the past few weeks alone around 1,000 people have met violent deaths.

The massacres have gone largely unreported in the Western press. Only recently the Vatican denounced the West's "ice-cold indifference to the unprecedented abyss of death".

Yet the West goes on trading and dealing normally with Algeria. France's government publicly supports the government of President Liamine Zeroual and gives it soft loans. The International Monetary Fund praises the economy. The country is earning huge revenues from the high prices it can command for its oil and gas from Europe. Investment is flowing in: it is business as usual.

The true extent of the slaughter can only be guessed at. It is too dangerous for foreign journalists to work effectively. More than 50 have been killed in the past five years. And as many as 100,000 civilians are thought to have been executed since 1992.

In the latest slaughter, armed men using knives and guns killed 70 people in three separate attacks, mutilating and burning their corpses, hospital sources reported on Tuesday. The killings followed bloody weekend attacks, including the death of 11 teachers who were slain as students watched in horror.

Last week a massacre took place at the Bentahla neighbourhood of Baraki, an eastern suburb of Algiers. At least 200 residents died and another 100 were wounded in what survivors described as scenes of unimaginable butchery.

The attackers, having forced their helpless captives out into the open using fire and grenades, set about the slaughter in a serious, yet reportedly leisurely fashion, slicing their victims' throats. As they retreated after what was said to be four hours of mayhem, the murderers torched the houses, leaving behind them complete devastation.

"A lot of women were kidnapped," said one survivor. "That's why there were not many females among the dead and wounded."

No one has claimed responsibility for the atrocity, but Bentahla is considered a stronghold of the Armed Islamic Groups (GIA). The relatively moderate Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), with whose leader the regime has been conducting talks, denounced the attack.

The attacks have hitherto been confined to provincial regions. With the underground militants, presumably members of the GIA, now carrying out their atrocities near army barracks, Algerians wonder if President Zeroual's army-backed regime is about to be overwhelmed, or if it is about to be torn apart by a power struggle between its moderates and extremists. President Zeroual himself believes in some kind of dialogue with the Islamist opposition, but hardline generals want to destroy it altogether. At all events, it is clear that the conflict is now entering a new, atrocious phase.

The Bentahla massacre came as a swift and savage rebuff to the claim by the prime minister, Ahmad Ouahia, only the day before, that the government is breaking the back of the terror. While admitting that attacks had made August "the blackest month since 1994" he made the now ritual assurance that only "remnants of terror" remain to be mopped up.

Ritual calls for an end to the bloodshed in Algeria and a collective wringing of hands were the West's reaction last week to the Bentahla massacre. The common response from diplomats was: "It is for the Algerians themselves to sort it out."

A spokesman for the French foreign ministry, Yves Doutriaux, said his government was "horror-stricken" by last week's atrocity. But he added that France "again stresses the need for a political settlement drafted by the Algerians themselves".

The French prime minister, Lionel Jospin, said on Monday that France would be more generous in handing out visas to Algerians whose lives were threatened in their country. Authorities are preparing a change in immigration laws that would grant political refugee status to all those under threat for their political stance and not only those threatened by governments.

Comment, page 12
Le Monde, page 13

Leaders agree to revive Mideast talks

John M Goshko in New York

WITH the United States secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, acting as mediator, Israeli and Palestinian leaders agreed on Monday to revive their stalled peace talks by returning to discussion of issues such as releasing Palestinian prisoners, redeploying Israeli forces from parts of the West Bank and providing an airport and seaport in Gaza.

In addition, the two sides agreed to meet in Washington next week to seek ways of advancing the peace process beyond these so-called "interim measures". While the talks will be the first since negotiations were suspended in March, officials called Monday's progress a sign of how far both sides have to go.

"I think we have arrested the downward spiral and taken a small step forward," Ms Albright said at a news conference after a day of talks with the Israeli foreign minister, David Levy, and the Palestinian Authority negotiator, Mahmoud Abbas.

Israel and the Palestinians had looked to Ms Albright to find a way to get the process back on track after it had bogged down in mutual anger and recrimination. The Israeli government, led by Binjamin Netanyahu, has accused the Palestinian Authority and its president, Yasser Arafat, of failing to crack down sufficiently on Palestinian terrorists who have killed large numbers of Israelis in suicide bomb attacks.

The Palestinians have reacted angrily to the Netanyahu government's policy of building Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Arab East Jerusalem, and sealing Palestinian areas from Israel in retaliation for suicide bombings.

But, starting with a visit by Ms Albright to the Middle East last month, the two sides have indicated that they wanted her to find a way for them to step back from confrontation and start talking again. — *Washington Post*

● Mr Netanyahu pledged last week to build 300 more Jewish homes on the West Bank and to "deepen Jewish roots" there. The US rebuked Israel for its "unhelpful" decision. Ahmed Tibi, Mr Arafat's political adviser, called it a "roadside bomb designed to explode at attempts to renew Israeli-Palestinian dialogue".

The Week

TEN people were killed and priceless art treasures destroyed in the historic tourist and pilgrimage centre of Assisi when two earthquakes hit central Italy.
Washington Post, page 16

NEARLY 1,000 people were missing in Bangladesh after a cyclone hit islands in the Bay of Bengal, killing at least 47 and devastating large areas.

THE popularity of Australia's prime minister, John Howard, has taken a hammering in polls as a result of a travel claims scandal that has claimed three ministerial scalps and rocked his conservative government.
Comment, page 12

NEW ZEALAND submitted the largest offer of reparations to native Maoris, covering grievances that date back 150 years. The package includes $109 million in cash, rights to name rivers and mountains, and rights to land and resources. It also includes a public apology from the Crown for breaches of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi between Maoris and European settlers.

WINNIE MANDELA, appearing before South Africa's Truth Commission, demanded that she be questioned in public in connection with murders and other criminal activities.

A FORMER policeman, Derek Nally, is to stand for the Irish presidency, the only man among five contenders running for the office.

THE Mir cosmonaut Vasily Tsibliyev was exonerated by the head of a commission investigating a near-fatal crash at the space station in June.

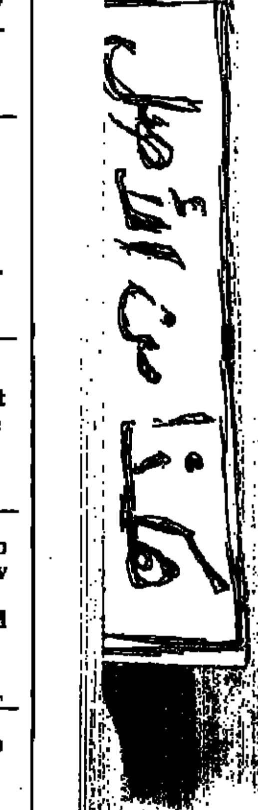
DUTY-FREE sales on planes and ships within the European Union will be axed on schedule in June 1999 to conform with single-market rules, European Commissioner Mario Monti said.

FRENCH authorities are investigating allegations that farmers are injecting beef cattle with rat poison to mask illegal growth hormones.

THE Basque separatist group ETA suffered a serious blow when two members of its most active terrorist units were killed in a shootout with Spanish civil guards in Bilbao.

SOUTH Korea announced an amnesty for seven tycoons convicted of bribing disgraced former president Roh Tae-woo, in order to "promote an economic recovery and national harmony".

ROY LICHTENSTEIN, one of the pioneers of Pop Art, has died aged 73.



US threatens trade war over Iran oil

Paul Webster in Paris

THE United States threatened Europe with a trade war this week after condemning a $2 billion French natural gas deal with Iran that defies US legislation on doing business with Tehran.

The US senator Alfonse D'Amato called for sanctions against Total, the private French oil giant that signed the deal to develop the South Pars gas field in the Gulf in the biggest transaction between a European country and Iran since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

"There is no doubt that Total has been trying to precipitate a dispute with this contract over the implementation of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act," Mr D'Amato said in a statement.

Washington swept aside a warning by Paris not to retaliate against Total, whose decision to defy the US followed encouragement from the European Commission. The Commission — which is attacking US legislation aimed at restricting trade with Iran and Libya — recently ordered European Union countries to ignore laws intended to punish foreign firms that work with the two countries. Washington accuses Iran and Libya of being linked to terrorism.

Christopher Bush, a state department spokesman, said that curbing trade against Iran was the law and the US intended to apply it in full. "Our position on any investments in Iranian gas and oil fields is clear," he said. "Such investments make more resources available for Iran to use in supporting terrorism and pursuing missiles and nuclear weapons."

A French foreign ministry spokesman, Jacques Rummelhardt, had said earlier that France hoped that President Bill Clinton, would not apply penalties designed to stop deals worth more than $20 million with Iran.

"France hopes that the American administration will weigh carefully the consequences of an application of this law," Mr Rummelhardt added, in an implicit reference to EU complaints to the World Trade Organisation about US attempts to restrict trade with Iran and Libya. "Application of the provisions of this law would constitute a serious precedent in international trade."

Europe's case at the WTO has been suspended until October 15 in the hope of a behind-the-scenes settlement, but officials here said that new measures would be pursued if the US took action against Total.

Although Total is a private company and need not seek government approval for foreign contracts, the firm's chairman, Thierry Desmarest, said that he had the full support of the Socialist-led government and the European Commission.

"It will not please some American politicians but I believe it will just be a bad-tempered reaction," Mr Desmarest said. "These stories of [Iran] financing terrorism are absurd."

The French prime minister's office pointed out that Iran was not subject to United Nations sanctions, and that Total was free to draw up contracts without government approval.

France has taken a lead in calling for an end to restrictive measures against Iran through a policy described as "constructive political dialogue" aimed at reinstating the privileged investment position enjoyed by France before the Shah was deposed. After helping the late Ayatollah Khomeini establish Islamic rule by allowing him to organise the revolution on French soil, France was seen as an enemy and became a target for terrorists.

Recent moves to liberalise the Islamic regime have reassured Paris that the time for a new, open policy has arrived, officials said.

Scramble for oil, page 19

Voters uneasy in Berlin of the Balkans

Jonathan Steele in Brcko

ISMET DZANOVIC sits on his front lawn, wondering whether the international forces in the Jeeps and armoured vehicles that parade up and down the road have the willpower to reunify his home town.

Brcko is known as the Berlin of the Balkans, and tension in this divided city has never been higher. The results of local elections that could restore control to the Bosniac — Muslim — majority who fled five years ago have already been delayed twice.

The Serbs who form the majority of Brcko's current residents say they are confident they have won, but international officials say their optimism is premature.

For Mr Dzanovic, the result is crucial as it could encourage more Muslims to join him. He is one of a small and brave band that has come back into what is now Serb territory. Round-the-clock international convoys provide a semblance of protection.

An invisible barrier of hate runs across the road between Mr Dzanovic's home and the Serbs who have occupied former Muslim houses 100 metres away. "They have found the angriest, most hostile Serbs, people who have themselves been displaced several times, and given them the Muslim houses," said an international official.

Mr Dzanovic says he cannot go into the town centre. "It would be far too dangerous. Last year we organised a bus to visit the Muslim cemetery with an international escort. It was stoned."

Mr Dzanovic and his wife live as pioneers. Their neighbours' homes are roofless and wrecked. The Serb authorities have refused to supply electricity or water.

Brcko is the only place in Bosnia that was put under international arbitration at the Dayton peace conference two years ago. Its strategic position at the centre of the corridor linking the eastern and western halves of the Serb-held Bosnian entity, Republika Srpska, made it too sensitive for an immediate decision. The Bosniacs want it because it also sits astride the north-south axis linking Bosnia's Muslim-Croat Federation with Croatia.

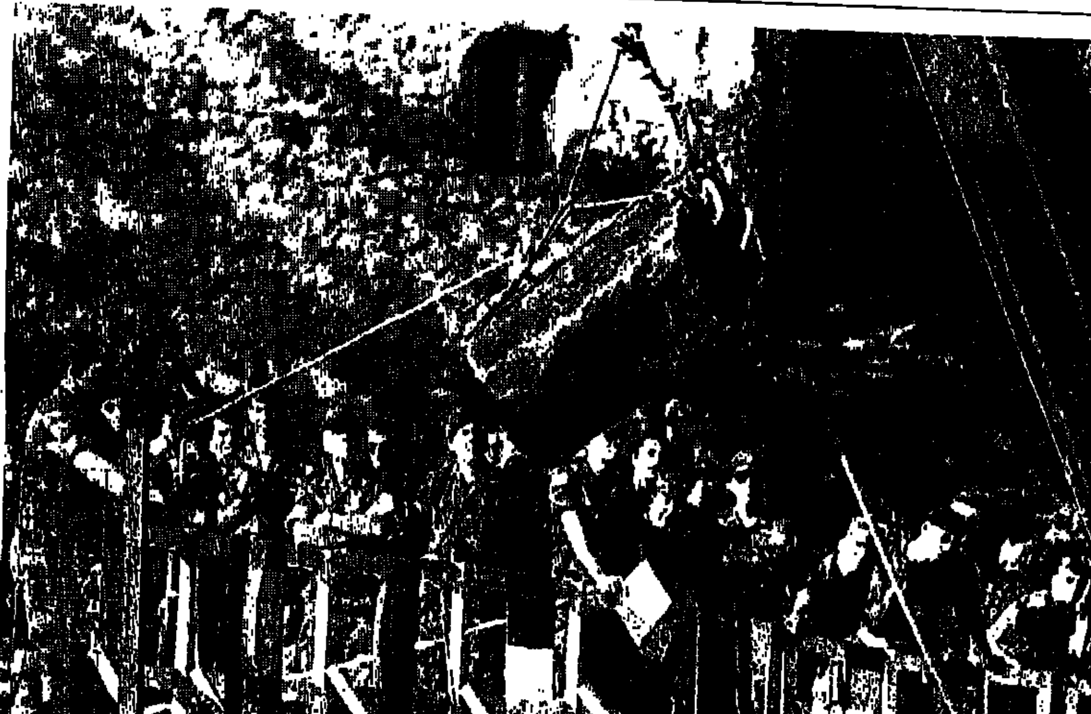
Because both communities hope the elections will reinforce their claims before next year's arbitration award, they tried to pad the voter rolls. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe found so much fraud on the Serb side that the first register had to be cancelled.

Even after a second registration, the OSCE rejected more than 3,000 dubious applications, all suspected to be from Serbs.

Brcko is still recovering from pre-election violence, when a Serb mob stoned the office of the international administrator and destroyed several United Nations vehicles. Fearful of being a sitting target, United States troops, part of the international force, withdrew their guard post from the bridge to Croatia a few days later.

If victory goes to the Muslims, the international community could face more than stones. "They're already threatening us with Belfast scenarios," said one monitor.

Washington Post, page 15



Soldiers of the multinational Stabilisation Force serving in Bosnia watch the first stone of Mostar's famed Ottoman bridge being lifted out of the Neretva river, launching its reconstruction PHOTO: DANILO KRSTANOVIC

Pfennigs from heaven for Germany's flood victims

Denis Staunton in Berlin

WHEN it rains along the river Oder, it rains pfennigs from heaven — but only for Germans.

Victims of this summer's floods have been so overwhelmed by donations that aid organisations believe some will actually profit from the disaster. Meanwhile the Czech Republic and Poland are struggling to rebuild schools and hospitals and to rehouse thousands of people.

Germans donated more than DM100 million ($58 million) in the aftermath of the floods, which wreaked havoc in central Europe for more than a month. Some donations were earmarked for reconstruction projects in Poland and the Czech Republic, but most were directed at fellow Germans in the eastern state of Brandenburg.

The bill for repairing Brandenburg's roads alone comes to DM170 million, but charitable donations must go to individuals, not public projects.

The problem is that only 155 houses on the eastern side of the Oder suffered flood damage, making about 500 people potential beneficiaries. In contrast, 1,365 Polish villages were destroyed, creating more than 140,000 victims, while 40 per cent of the entire area of the Czech Republic was affected, leaving hospitals, old people's homes and kindergartens ruined and 200,000 people in need of help.

The German Red Cross is discreetly channelling most new donations to Poland and the Czech Republic, but other organisations fear protests from German donors if their money is sent abroad.

Brandenburg's state government is so flush with donated cash that it is promising to pay uninsured flood victims 90 per cent of their rebuilding costs, as well as a generous furniture allowance.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY October 5 1997

Indonesia air crash kills 234

John Aglionby in Jakarta

AN INDONESIAN airliner crashed last week in dense forest as it was trying to land on the Indonesian island of Sumatra in the thick haze choking much of southeast Asia. All 234 passengers and crew on board died.

The Airbus A300 B-4, owned by Indonesia's state airline, Garuda, plunged into a 1,000ft-deep jungle-covered mountainous ravine four minutes before it was due to land in Medan, in northern Sumatra.

Speculation on what caused the crash took a dramatic twist on Monday with the release of an unofficial transcript of the pilot's last exchanges with air traffic controllers.

Human error now seems a likely contributing factor in the disaster, after the publication of the last 12 minutes of the conversation between the pilot and an unidentified controller at the plane's destination.

The text shows the two men confused the words left and right. The conversation was allegedly overheard and recorded by two planes, owned by domestic Indonesian airlines Bouraq and Merpati, which were respectively taking off and landing from Medan airport shortly before the ill-fated flight was due to arrive.

Even though both men were Indonesian they were speaking in English, the standard practice in air traffic control around the world. Neither the voice nor flight data recorders have been recovered from the crash site, a deep ravine 30km south of Medan. But it is known the plane was slightly off course and flying well below the 7,500 feet recommended to clear the mountains surrounding Medan.

It is thought that Rachmo Wiyogo, a pilot with more than 20 years' experience, might have been disoriented by the thick haze. Visibility was thought to be less than 400m but, according to Garuda pilots, this is more than sufficient to land safely.

Identified by the flight number, GA 152, in the transcript, Wiyogo was first told to descend to 3,000 feet and turn left, a standard procedure to make a loop north of the airport before landing to allow other aircraft to clear the runway. Wiyogo was concerned that he was not high enough to clear the mountains. The controller said he was.

For an unknown reason, instructions were then sent twice and confirmed twice to turn right and not left.

"This clearly shows that the crash was not Rachmo's fault," a Garuda pilot said.

The heavy haze that has blanketed Indonesia after weeks of uncontrollable fires has forced cancellation of flights and frequently closed airports for weeks. Rescuers said the haze and rugged terrain prevented helicopters reaching the crash site.

Witnesses said the plane had been flying low in the haze, hit a tree and smashed into pieces. National Anteve television quoted witnesses as saying there was an explosion seconds before impact.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
October 5 1997

Belgium settles back into status quo

COMMENT
Stephen Bates

THIS time last year a new public mood seemed to be stirring in Belgium. In the wake of the awful discovery of a paedophile ring and a dawning realisation that the incompetence of the police and judicial authorities had allowed it to flourish, a tidal wave of disgust and national recrimination washed across the country.

A third of a million Belgians marched through Brussels to demand change. People would accost you in the streets to say how disgusted they were with their country.

A year on, the authorities have achieved little and torpor has once more settled on the country. The only people planning to march these days are magistrates, protesting *against* any change to the system. The magistrates' role includes inquiring into crimes and supervising the judicial police as opposed to the separate gendarmerie. They think they are overworked and underpaid.

And, in defiance of the government's plans to set up an independent police force, they want to keep control of all police investigations — despite a track record of failing to solve any major crime in recent memory. Theirs is a classic case of the status quo defending itself.

Those arrested in the paedophile scandal, headed by the Charleroi handyman Marc Dutroux, were caught despite, not because of, the police investigation. They have now been in prison for nearly 14 months and are unlikely to come to trial until the end of next year.

Despite ferocious criticism of the authorities, who desultorily investigated the disappearance of a succession of children before Dutroux was arrested and dead bodies began to surface, not a single head has rolled.

When the government tried to sack the chief magistrate of Brussels, Benoit Dejemeppe — described by the parliamentary commission that investigated the handling of the paedophile inquiries as incompetent and not up to the job — it was blandly told by the supreme court prosecutor-general that his shortcomings were not serious enough to justify disciplinary action.

Belgians have been forced to contemplate the fact that the comfortable, convenient ways on which they have prided themselves — the elevation of compromise into a principle, inertia into a system, and bureaucracy into an artwork — have failed them. But how do you change this?

The premium put on consensus and deal-making once seemed essential in a country divided between two language groups and a duplication of political parties. The idea of dividing up appointments to police and judiciary between political and linguistic candidates even seemed like a good idea if it meant no one group won political control.

But the price of this is the appointment of candidates who do not owe advancement to ability, and the elevation of mediocrities who could not get on in any other way. The system also means there has been little political pressure to change, and that there are no votes in law and order.

Contemplating the mess, an eminent Belgian lawyer said: "As long as at the summit of the judiciary there is no real will to make the apparatus function, any political will for change will just hit teflon."

No wonder most Belgians in a recent poll believed the system would not really change — however much they wanted it to.

Germany and Austria sued over pollution

Paul Brown

SCIENTISTS from the Black Sea states are to take legal action against Germany and Austria to force them to stop polluting the Danube river.

Large quantities of nitrate and phosphorous are reaching the Black Sea via the Danube, causing algae blooms that are killing millions of fish. More than 40 fish species appear to have become extinct.

Scientific reports analysing Danube water at the borders of the 11 countries through which the river flows put Austria and Germany at the top of the list for nitrogen discharges. Both European Union countries each discharge more than 100 tonnes a year, 35 per cent of the total reaching the Black Sea. Together they discharge 11 per cent of the phosphorous.

The decision to take legal action was made aboard the ship El Venizelos where scientists, church leaders and politicians are attending a floating conference, the Black Sea In Crisis.

Among the delegates is the European Commission Environment Commissioner, Ritt Bjerregaard, who is embarrassed by the scientific disclosures. Both countries appear to be in breach of EU environmental legislation.

Romania, on the Black Sea coast, has a high incidence of blue baby syndrome caused by nitrate in drinking water. Nitrate combines with haemoglobin in the blood, preventing it taking up oxygen.

Until 1991 Romania was itself the highest single polluter of the Danube, but the collapse of the economy and the inability of farmers to buy fertiliser means its contribution to the problem and the number of babies dying has been drastically reduced.

Although the two EU states' contribution to the total pollution in the Black Sea is relatively small, they have both the technology and the resources to prevent it.

But at Odessa, on the Ukrainian coast, the two sewage treatment plants have broken down and raw sewage is pouring on to what were holiday beaches. Bathing is banned after outbreaks of cholera and persistent dysentery.

Fish catches slumped after 1985 as a result of algae blooms that cut out the light from the Black Sea shelf.

Money lies at the root of all politics

WASHINGTON DIARY
Martin Kettle

ONE hundred and eighteen years ago, in the spring of 1879, Rutherford Hayes became the first United States president to install a telephone line in the White House. Four years later, in 1883, the US Congress passed a law that became known, after its sponsor, as the Pendleton Act. It says that federal employees shall not solicit or receive any contribution for election campaign funds "in any room or building occupied in the discharge of official duties". But it is only now, in 1997, that the telephone and the Pendleton Act have crossed lines.

Today, the Pendleton Act is the legal battlefield on which the political credibility of President Bill Clinton's second term is being fought out. It is the statute that could decide whether Vice-President Al Gore can plausibly win the Democratic nomination and succeed Clinton in the White House in three years' time. And it has become the unlikely catalyst for a wide-ranging examination of the modern political morality, not just of the US but of other nations too, including Britain.

From the days of Hayes to those of Clinton, no one has ever been prosecuted under the Pendleton Act for anything they did on the telephone. Now that may be all about to change, at least if the Justice Department decides that the White House fund-raising calls which Clinton and Gore may or may not have made last year — the point is keenly disputed — are deemed to fall foul of Pendleton. The US attorney-general Janet Reno, a Clinton appointee, will decide shortly whether there is a case to answer.

Yet surely this is all a nonsense? The Pendleton law, or at least this construction of it, has got to be an ass. If a party leader in this day and age can't telephone his supporters and ask for support, then how can he do his job? If Clinton and Gore are lawbreakers then so are most of their recent predecessors, and so is every senator or congressman who has ever sat in a corridor on Capitol Hill and used his cellphone to hassle for funds from the people who sent him to Washington.

If this arcane dispute was the beginning and end of the current US obsession with campaign funding abuses, then it could safely be dismissed. That is why most Democrats duly dismiss it as a piece of despicable party political opportunism from a Republican Party that needs no lessons from anyone in the black arts of political funding. "We've done nothing that we didn't learn from them," was how a White House official put it privately the other day.

And that, of course, is how the public sees it, which is, in turn, why this who-said-what-from-where argument broadens irresistibly into something that matters very much indeed. Look in any US newspaper these days and you will find stories about the iffy interface between money and politics.

Clinton, Gore and the Democratic National Committee are the prime examples, inevitably. But what about the ex-Republican chairman Haley Barbour, who was revealed last week to be under investigation for his part in negotiating a $1.6 million donation to party funds that originated in Hong Kong? Or the Republican mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani, whose re-election campaign has just been fined $220,000 for illegal fund-raising?



In these circumstances, it is hard to dispute what John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO trade union federation, said at his conference in Pittsburgh last month: "Our political system is awash with dirty money, corporate money and foreign money. It is corrupting our elected officials, and it is corroding the soul of our nation."

On one level, these are important enough reasons for taking Washington's current preoccupation with campaign funding very seriously. But there are broader reasons too, because these examples articulate a global problem — the relationship between money and politics — which constantly saps, or threatens to sap the public credibility of political institutions, democratic debate and elected leaders.

It would be very convenient, though still not easy, if the relationship was wholly or primarily a question of corruption and sleaze. These things have their parts to play. But the real issue is the persistent and growing disparity between the cost of modern politics and the income available to pay for it. This is dramatically obvious, especially on the personal level, in the US, where personal wealth is a necessary precondition of a political career. The mythology says anyone can rise from log cabin to White House, but in reality the route to the Oval office begins not in a shack or a tenement block, but in a boardroom.

Note also that the system itself has become more voracious. We commentators say — with a certain awe — that the president's secret is that he is always running for office, that no sooner had he won his first term than he began campaigning to win a second, and that no sooner had he secured a second than he began to campaign for Gore to win in 2000.

In Britain, equally awe-struck, we say the same about the Prime Minister, Tony Blair. We say that we now live in the age of the permanent campaign — and we say it because it is true. Yet we have not adjusted to paying for it.

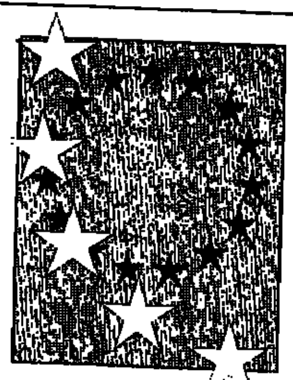
"They're all the same" is mostly a facile, lazy and undeserved accusation. Yet, once made, it is hard to dislodge. People have come to believe the worst of politicians, not just in the US where politico-scepticism has long been part of the culture but in many parts of western Europe and, especially under the Conservatives, in Britain too.

In the past the answer may have been for clean politicians to oust dirty ones. That is still desirable. But today it is not a question of individuals. The problem is not men but measures. These politicians are not all crooks, even if a few of them are. What is happening in the US — and increasingly in Britain too — is endemic and structural.

The answer, self-evidently to many, is campaign reform. From a combination of moral instinct and political self-interest, both the Democrats and Britain's Labour party are now trying this tack. Both are demanding transparency, limits on spending, ceilings on donations, bans on foreign support, and public funding of parties. But the problem they fail to address is that these are counter-cultural propositions in a low-tax, low-spend, market-driven and politically sceptical world.

"Why should we pay?" the voters ask. A fair question. But one with an incontrovertible answer. Unless we pay for it publicly, someone else will pay for it privately. And that is exactly why the whole argument has arisen in the first place.

Single-minded drive to a single currency



Europe this week
Martin Walker

ONE crosses more than the Atlantic in flying from Washington to Brussels. Back in the peace and prosperity of the United States, where the president proclaims that "the era of big government is over", there are few burning political questions.

In the new Europe, by contrast, all is grandiose ambition and breathtaking political risk. Already the most sweeping example of social engineering in the post-war period, the European Union, is now proposing to expand up to the frontiers of Russia while simultaneously creating a new super-currency on a scale to match the dollar. All this proceeds despite unemployment in France and Germany being stuck at around 13 per cent, levels unknown since the 1930s.

Political caution might suggest that the budget-cutting deflation required to join the new euro currency should be relaxed, at least until unemployment drops. But political logic would probably not have built the EU in the first place, and the visionaries of Brussels have long enjoyed a certain detachment from the hard realities of life in the unemployment queues.

Once again, it appears that Europe's social engineers are winning. After last month's meeting of the EU's 15 finance ministers, who agreed to lock in the various countries' exchange rates next May, the new single currency is now almost certain to start on time in January 1999. Ten and possibly 11 countries now seem likely to sign up from the start. The exceptions are Greece, whose economy is too weak, and Britain, Sweden and Denmark, who have been dubious about the project all along.

The British scepticism has many roots, including the anti-European sentiments of Margaret Thatcher and her acolytes, and the long British tradition of being late to join successive European systems. It is ironic now, because the booming British economy is one of the few that can honestly claim to meet the tough, German-devised criteria for the euro. These criteria call for a budget deficit of less than 3 per cent of gross domestic product, and total government debt of less than 60 per cent of GDP.

Still, at fearsome deflationary cost and with some fancy book-keeping, France, Germany, Italy and Spain can all claim to be converging to meet the spirit, if not the letter, of the Maastricht criteria. And the consensus of the markets, Wall Street, Washington and all European governments is that the euro will now start as planned.

This poses a sharp dilemma for the new British government led by Tony Blair, still enjoying its honeymoon in Europe, especially as the City of London, the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry and the regional chambers of commerce have all now said that, on balance, Britain ought to join. A key block of Labour MPs in the European Parliament, all supporters of Britain joining the euro, have launched a campaign to convert the Labour party at its conference this week.

The campaign of Labour's European MPs was given fresh urgency in the US last week, where Wall Street and Clinton administration officials warned a visiting British delegation that the pound and the British economy would suffer if its membership of the European Monetary Union (EMU) were much delayed.

"We really cannot countenance the idea that we stay out for very long. We have to join within at the latest two or three years after the euro is launched, or the markets will get nervous and Britain will pay a price. That is the message I am getting here," Alan Donnelly, Labour MEP for Tyne and Wear, said from Washington. "So far, we've just had a phoney war and the British people have not been informed about the real issues of monetary union."

European MPs in both parties have seized on the call by the British Chancellor, Gordon Brown, for a national debate on the euro. The depleted rump of 18 Tory MEPs pressed their new party leader, William Hague, to shelve his leadership election campaign pledge to rule out joining the currency for at least 10 years.

"We did not join the EU to shut out Europe. The Conservatives never got anywhere by ideology and being Eurosceptic did not win us any seats," said Edward McMillan-Scott, MEP for North Yorkshire, and newly elected leader of the Tory group in the European Parliament.

The debate in Britain, once it finally starts, is likely to be tinged with complacency, based on Britain's currently good economic performance, and with the traditional xenophobia from the right-wing media and backbenches. This is a pity because the case for the euro deserves to be examined rather more thoroughly than it has been in Europe, where Chancellor Helmut Kohl's desire to leave a lasting legacy of a Europeanised Germany (rather than a Germanised Europe) has made the symbolic shift to the new currency into an article of faith.

Much of official Brussels is currently reading a rather heavy fairy tale, The Crash Of 2003, produced by the Centre for the Study of Financial Innovation, which purports to be an official British report of the euro's failure. The plot has France destabilised by strikes and demos and a 35 per cent vote for the extreme right National Front. Kohl's successor in Berlin refuses to bail them out, while Britain sits smugly on the sidelines.

At a Brussels debate on this fable last week, organised by the Philip Morris Institute (a useful outlet for tobacco profits), the plot was challenged by veteran Eurocrats for failing to recognise how far shared sovereignty has outdated such nationalist reflexes. The most interesting critic was Vernon Weaver, the US ambassador to the EU, who suggested that the euro would be so beneficial for small businesses (and for US multinationals) that their growth would preclude such an economic disaster.

It is striking to see Americans so supportive of a new currency that is likely to challenge the dominance of the dollar as a reserve currency. Striking, but also characteristic of a long US benevolence towards Europe, which dates back to the Marshall Aid plan and Nato, continues in Bosnia today, and without whose military guarantees the grandiose ambitions of Brussels would be so much hot air.

Nurses face long haul for Saudi clemency

Ian Black in New York and Kathy Evans

HOPES rose last weekend that two British nurses in jail in Saudi Arabia would be spared beheading or flogging after the UK Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, won "sympathy" from the Saudi foreign minister for the depth of concern about the case.

Last week relations between Britain and Saudi Arabia lurched towards a crisis after Lucille McLauchlan, one of the nurses charged with murdering an Australian colleague was sentenced to eight years in jail and 500 lashes. Mr Cook said the punishment was "wholly unacceptable in the modern world".

The verdict and sentence against a second British nurse, Deborah Parry, was unclear. Early reports said she had been sentenced to death by beheading.

Both women deny killing Yvonne Gilford, an Australian colleague at the military medical centre in eastern Saudi Arabia where all three worked. They retracted confessions they said were made after sexual and physical abuse following their arrest for the murder last December. Gilford had been stabbed 13 times, bludgeoned and suffocated.

The two British nurses have been living in fear of a public beheading for the past nine months. However, that prospect was removed last week with the news that an agreement had been reached with the murder victim's brother, Frank Gilford, to waive the death penalty. Letters outlining a cash deal to save Parry's life were released by her lawyers last week, confirming a deal with Mr Gilford.

Frank Gilford, brother of the murdered Australian nurse, left, and the two British nurses charged with committing the crime, Deborah Parry, centre, and Lucille McLauchlan

A series of letters from Mr Gilford's Australian lawyers and senior British officials was disclosed by the nurses' lawyer, Salah Hejailan. Details released maintain that Mr Gilford is seeking some $700,000 in personal compensation and $500,000 for a hospital in Australia.

Further evidence of the agreement came in a letter to Mr Hejailan from Andrew Green, the British ambassador in Riyadh. Dated September 20, it congratulated the Saudi lawyer on Mr Gilford's signing of the Deed of Settlement: "The practical effect, as I understand it, is that the two nurses no longer face the death penalty."

However, Mr Gilford denies having already concluded a "blood money" deal, despite publication of the documents by Mr Hejailan.

Following the first reports of the verdicts against the nurses, Saudi Arabia's London envoy, Ghazi Gosaibi, rejected any criticism of his country's judicial system. "We are not going to change our system, our religion and our customs to appease bleeding heart liberals," he said.

However, speaking after a "very useful" 50-minute meeting with Prince Saud al-Faisal in New York on Friday last week, Mr Cook said: "I made a humanitarian plea this afternoon and it was heard with sympathy. I am now more hopeful than I was before this meeting that we will be able to achieve a humane outcome."

Mr Cook said he had conveyed to Prince Saud "the distress of the families and the concern of the public in Britain at reports of the sentences". He added: "Prince Saud made it clear that there is still some way to go on the legal proceedings, but he understood and appreciated the depth of concern that I was conveying."

Although it could take months before legal proceedings are exhausted, the meeting provided the first real sign of a Saudi willingness to defuse the worst crisis in Anglo-Saudi relations in 20 years.

Shortly before the meeting over tea in the prince's suite at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, reports of three more beheadings in Jeddah underlined the reality of the Saudi version of Islamic justice. The two Nigerians and an Afghan beheaded by sword for smuggling heroin brought to 109 the number of convicted criminals executed in Saudi Arabia this year.

Mr Cook said that progress was also made in ensuring access to McLauchlan and Parry.

Prince Saud said in a statement: "I explained that our judicial system is totally independent and assured him that the two nurses will continue to have a fair trial. Any form of interference in the legal process could only complicate the issue."

Mr Cook said that the British government would still support a negotiated agreement between Mr Gilford and the families of her alleged killers. "We will be pursuing the possibility of a settlement with the family of the victim . . . Should that track not meet with success there are legal proceedings still in front of us, including an appeal," he said.

"Only at the end of that process, if the sentences remained, would the question of clemency arise. We would not expect and we are not asking the Saudi authorities to interfere with the court process."

Observers say the Saudi royal family, accused by its detractors of corruption, is vulnerable to criticism from militant Islamic hardliners that it is deviating from orthodox practice, especially in its treatment of Western criminals.

The British consul, Lawson Ross, visited the two nurses in prison in Dhahran last Sunday. He briefed them on the meeting between the British and Saudi foreign ministers. "They had a good meeting. The two women seemed to be in good spirits," a spokesman from the Foreign Office said.

Comment, page 12

The Week in Britain James Lewis

Ashdown delivers a lesson in compromise

PADDY ASHDOWN, the Liberal Democrat leader, played a risky game and got away with it when he persuaded his troops at the party's annual conference in Eastbourne that it was possible to co-operate with the Government, in areas where the two parties are in agreement, while maintaining the Liberal Democrats' distinctive identity and reserving the right to criticise with vigour where necessary.

His chief task was to reassure anxious tribalists in his party who fear they are about to be gobbled up by New Labour, with its overwhelming Commons majority. He did that by taking swipes at the Chancellor's Budget, the Home Secretary's disregard for civil liberties, and the embarrassing Millennium Dome. This latter is the responsibility of Peter Mandelson, who had earlier warned Mr Ashdown, in rather sinister tones, about playing the "dangerous game of oppositionitis".

But Mr Ashdown's main thrust — and a message some delegates were not eager to hear — was that the Liberal Democrats must compromise to win "real prizes" such as a proportional voting system. He warned against "excessive concern for our own purity" and said that, while maintaining suspicions about New Labour, they had no choice but to work with it in a spirit of "constructive opposition".

The conference went on to call for a permanent standing commission to promote public discussion of the hard choices facing the National Health Service; to condemn the imposition of tuition fees on university students; and to call for a Royal Commission to review the law on euthanasia.

Looking on was the former Liberal leader, Jeremy Thorpe, making his first conference appearance for almost 20 years. Now frail and suffering from Parkinson's disease, Mr Thorpe played a big part in the Liberals' climb-back from the wilderness years of the 1950s but stood down in 1976 after nine years as leader. He was later acquitted of conspiracy to murder and has since made few public appearances.

FOR THE Labour party, this week's annual conference in Brighton was — and was cleverly designed to be — a giant celebration of the first general election victory for 23 years. Members are still euphoric, and the public approval ratings of the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, are so high that even party officials describe them as "ludicrous".

Mr Blair was expected to use his conference speech to warn members against complacency and to point to the "modernising" (the latest "in" word) tasks that lie ahead. Since the election, action on a whole range of problems has been postponed by burying them in reviews and committees, so the conference was left little scope for debating them.

The Prime Minister's biggest worry will be the prospect of a rebellion over the imposition of university tuition fees next year. He is likely to attempt to placate the education lobby by announcing extra money for the schools building programme.

He was expected to receive a cool reception from those who want the basic state pension uprated and who want strengthened employment rights strengthened and a statutory minimum wage.

DOCTORS published a groundbreaking set of guidelines clarifying the circumstances in which seriously ill children should be allowed to die. Campaigners against abortion and euthanasia condemned the document as a piece of "nasty fascism" which promoted euthanasia under the guise of medical ethics.

The guidelines, drawn up by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, said doctors could consider withdrawing treatment when a child was brain dead or in a permanent vegetative state, when treatment might delay death but not stop suffering, when survival would leave the child with an unreasonable disability, or when the child and the family felt that further treatment was more than they could bear.

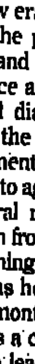
LONDON'S sex trade is worth £194 million — some 30 per cent more than London Transport's annual turnover — according to Middlesex University, which has carried out the first comprehensive audit of the capital's prostitution. It calculated that 80,000 clients a week used the services of 5,200 prostitutes.

In spite of the surprising scale of the trade, the audit showed that action by residents and the police, and growing violence, had led to a decline in street prostitution. This, however, had been more than matched by a growth in women operating from escort agencies, massage parlours, and "working flats".

A YOUNG WOMAN of normal intelligence who left school unable to write down a telephone number or a simple message won the first damages award in England for failure to diagnose dyslexia.

Pamela Phelps, aged 23, who sued the London borough of Hillingdon for condemning her to a life of "temporary menial tasks", won £45,650 damages. A judge ruled that an educational psychologist employed by Hillingdon, who assessed Ms Phelps when she was 12, had erred in attributing her learning difficulties to emotional problems.

Dozens of similar claims are expected to follow.



GUARDIAN WEEKLY October 5 1997

Cook lays down the law on arms

Michael White

THE Government has blocked two arms contracts with Indonesia in the first test of Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's ethical foreign policy governing exports to oppressive regimes.

In a symbolic show of determination — and in face of the risk of retaliation from the Indonesian government and anger from defence industry unions — the sale of armoured personnel carriers and a consignment of sniper rifles has been ruled in breach of Mr Cook's tough new guidelines.

The refusal to grant three applications for export licences is likely to reassure campaigners who attacked Mr Cook's new policy as an "empty gesture" last July when he admitted he must honour deals approved by the outgoing Tory government.

Campaigners will be hoping the move heralds a refusal to authorise bigger contracts, although the Foreign Office will consider each export application separately.

The applications — worth up to £1 million — were rejected on the advice of the Foreign Office after tripartite consultations with the Ministry of Defence and Department of Trade and Industry. It was feared the weapons, destined for security forces in Indonesia, could have been used for internal repression, including occupied East Timor. The manufacturers have already been told.

The director of the Defence Manufacturers' Association, Alan Sharman, greeted the move with disdain, claiming that Britain would now lose contracts deemed acceptable by the Government because UK companies would no longer be seen as trustworthy partners.

The shadow trade secretary, John Redwood, called for an immediate statement to clarify what is and what is not permissible.

The likelihood that ministers would refuse to authorise deals with Indonesia was signalled to senior members of the Suharto government during the Foreign Secretary's Asian tour in August. It prompted sharp exchanges between Mr Cook and his Indonesian counterpart, Ali Alatas, during the trip.

In a parallel shift on the development of his ethically-orientated approach, Mr Cook last week used a speech to the United Nations to warn that the Commonwealth would impose sanctions on Nigeria unless the West African military regime embarks upon long-promised democratic reforms.

Mr Cook predicted that this month's Commonwealth summit in Edinburgh will continue with Nigeria's suspension from the 53-nation body.


SDLP, Ulster Unionist and Sinn Fein leaders in rare proximity outside Stormont PHOTO: MARTIN McCULLOUGH

Ulster 'on the threshold of a new era'

ANALYSIS
John Mullin in Belfast

NORTHERN Ireland's political parties last week agreed a landmark compromise enabling them to break long-standing deadlock and move into full multi-party talks on the province's future.

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Mo Mowlam, hailed the deal as momentous. For the first time in 75 years, Unionists and Republicans would sit together to seek a solution to Ulster's problems, she said.

Bertie Ahern, Ireland's prime minister, said: "We stand on the threshold of a new era of peace and prosperity, if all the participants in the Northern Ireland peace process gain the confidence and courage to begin that painful dialogue, which alone can unlock the doors of consensus and agreement."

The parties had to agree the wording of a procedural motion before they could move on from the issue of the decommissioning of terrorist weapons, which has held up further discussion for 16 months. The compromise represents a climbdown for David Trimble, the leader of the Ulster Unionists. He had wanted the principle of consent and the disarmament of paramilitary groups during negotiations enshrined in the formula — he got neither.

There are three strands to the Stormont Castle talks, which will be debated concurrently: new arrangements for the internal government of Northern Ireland; relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic; and the links between London and Dublin. Strand two is certain to be the most difficult.

The business committee of the talks will meet under the chairmanship of the Canadian general John de Chastelain, to try to work out an order of business.

The reference point will be the Framework Document, produced by the British and Irish governments in February 1995 as a basis for discussions. Unionists saw it as a blueprint for hell; Sinn Fein as woefully inadequate. But both, incredibly, are on board, their private positions far removed from those argued in public. If there is to be a political settlement by next May, it will be built around the Framework Document.

Whether by design or happy coincidence, the Blair government can approach strand one with devolution for Scotland and for Wales already agreed. So why not Northern Ireland? Most observers believe agreement is possible. Northern Ireland's assembly would have around 90 members, elected on the basis of five for every Westminster constituency through the single transferable vote system. Where the debate will begin in earnest is over what powers the assembly should have, and which remain the preserve of Westminster.

As all this is being thrashed out, the parties will already be discussing strand two. The Unionists will demand that the Irish government drop its territorial claim to the six counties. Mr Ahern is prepared to wipe out articles two and three of the Irish constitution to achieve a settlement.

Beyond that, it is difficult to see progress. Unionists are prepared to have ad hoc arrangements with Irish authorities, so long as they get no executive power.

There is some irony on strand three. Unionists want the east-west relationship extended from the detested Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985. They argue it provided for one-way interference by Dublin.

Sinn Fein, as a party committed to independence, should see little reason for much of a defined relationship here at all.

Most pundits doubt whether a solution can be found, particularly with the tight deadline of next May. But before last week, many thought an agreement to begin talks was impossible.

One caller to Radio Ulster said: "The old certainties are gone. It's exciting, and it's terrifying."

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
October 5 1997

Mandelson defeated in NEC poll

Michael White and Ewen MacAskill

TONY BLAIR'S relentless drive to modernise the Labour party on Monday suffered its first post-election defeat when grassroots activists voted to put the leftwing rebel Ken Livingstone back on their national executive committee rather than promote the Prime Minister's key ally, Peter Mandelson.

Government and party officials made light of the symbolic defeat for the Minister without Portfolio, who had been making his first attempt to win elected office in a party where he has exercised legendary power as a backroom fixer for 13 years.

But Mr Livingstone said the result was a warning from the left. "Blair's no fool. He'll look at this and recognise it's a little bit of a prod from the rank and file of the party to say: 'You haven't got a blank cheque. You're there to do better. You'll always be under pressure to do better.'"

Officials described Mr Mandelson's failure to win a seat on the constituency section of the committee as a personal setback in what has long been the NEC's quirky "beauty contest". They contrasted the result with the overwhelming endorsement given on the first day of the Brighton conference to the radical "Partnership into Power" package of internal party reforms.

The most important since Labour's constitution was drafted in 1918, the changes to the conference, to policy-making and to the NEC itself are designed to keep party and Government working in harmony as the Blair revolution unfolds. Past Labour governments have collapsed in acrimonious feuds with the party.

But this milestone for party managers was overshadowed by Mr Mandelson's defeat. "This was not a verdict on Old Labour versus New Labour," said one senior official. "People vote for big names. Peter is not a Brown, Straw or Cook," said another. That snap verdict may be unjust to Mr Mandelson whose fame — or notoriety — among Labour supporters reflects his real influence in Downing Street.

Others elected to the constituency section of the committee were (in descending order of votes accrued): Robin Cook, David Blunkett, Mo Mowlam, Dennis Skinner, Harriet Harman and Diane Abott.

Brown fails to rock Brighton

Michael White and Seumas Milne

GORDON BROWN this week promised to avoid past Labour errors of economic management as well as Tory failures when he invoked his vision of a skills-based Britain which would deliver New Labour's goal of "employment opportunity for all" in the 21st century.

In an impassioned speech to Labour's Brighton conference, the Chancellor placed fairness and social justice at the heart of a programme which, he told delegates, had begun to be put in place in the five months since the prime minister, Tony Blair, swept to power.

But throughout his speech he denounced quick fixes or unidentified "irresponsible demands" which could threaten the Government's goals. Modernisation was not about image but about substance, he said, singling out the failures of incoming Labour governments in 1964 and 1974 as well as excessive Tory faith in free-market boom-and-bust economics in the 1980s. That implied a continuation of tight controls over public spending and public sector pay. His audience noted the warning, and the Chancellor received no standing ovation.

Mr Brown boasted of the extra money for health and education flowing from the tax reforms in his July Budget, not least the £5 billion windfall tax he is exacting from the privatised utilities.

"We have seen a glimpse of a new Britain that is possible. Since May 1 we have seen the relief and optimism expressed in people's faces, we have heard the hopes in people's voices," he declared.

In reinstating Labour's historic commitment to full employment, Mr Brown laid out a three-pronged approach to ending the dole queues: better education, a more competitive economy in which jobs would multiply, and welfare-to-work reform imposing both rights and responsibilities on the unemployed.

He gave no new details but did confirm that the Treasury was "examining a new tax credit for the low paid, paid direct through the wage packet" as well as a 10p starter rate of income tax and changes in benefits and National Insurance.

On the need for a more efficient economy to cope with the global market Labour has embraced, he declared: "Let every private monopoly, cartel or vested interest know that we will open up our economy to more competition and investment so that our creative talents and entrepreneurial spirit flourish."

In the conference debate on economic policy and employment rights, delegates voted through a motion urging ministers to grant full employment rights to workers from day one of a new job, rather than having to wait two years. The Government is pledged to consider the case.

"We are not arguing for a return to the 1970s, but people must be treated with dignity and respect," said Tony Dubbins, the printers' leader.

With all sides eager to avoid a clash at Labour's victory conference, Rodney Bickerstaffe, leader of the public service union Unison, said public sector workers were always the first to feel the chill of an economic downturn and the last to feel the warmth of an upturn.

He appealed to Mr Brown to take steps to raise his members' pay and to drop the private finance initiative on which ministers are depending for extra capital to build and manage schools and hospitals. But the general union GMB and transport union RMT backed off pressing the issue to a vote.

The package of employments rights urged by the conference included full legal protection from dismissal for strikers and hinted at a return to legal secondary action in line with international conventions.

● Tony Blair was expected to emphasise modernisation in his keynote speech on Tuesday, the first by a Labour prime minister in 19 years, and to argue for a "hard-edged compassion" in government.

Mad cow disease linked to new variant CJD

Chris Mihill

THE link between BSE — mad cow disease — and the new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease which has killed 21 people has been proved, scientists said on Monday.

The link between infected beef and humans with new variant CJD has been suspected for years and the findings have already brought renewed calls by families of victims for a judicial inquiry into the BSE affair, for compensation for those who have died and for help with nursing costs for those looking after dying relatives.

Scientists in two separate studies of mice have found that the effects in the brain, symptoms and incubation period seen in BSE in cattle is identical to that caused by the variant CJD (v-CJD).

"This makes it highly likely that humans with v-CJD contracted it by consuming meat from cattle infected with BSE," they say.

The studies have been carried out by Moira Bruce at the Institute of Animal Health, Edinburgh, and by John Collinge of the prion disease group at the Imperial College of Medicine, London.

Dr Bruce and colleagues injected laboratory mice with infectious brain samples from cows, patients with v-CJD, patients with naturally occurring CJD and farmers who died of CJD after working with animals with BSE.

The researchers studied incubation period, the brain damage caused and the areas of brain damaged. They conclude the type of brain damage, symptoms and course of v-CJD in mice are identical to that of BSE in mice — and distinct from other forms of CJD.

Dr Bruce and colleagues write: "Epidemiological surveillance continues to indicate that v-CJD is a new condition occurring almost exclusively in the UK. Our studies . . . provide compelling evidence of a link between BSE and v-CJD."

Professor Collinge and colleagues used a different approach but came to similar conclusions. Using biochemical tests, they show that the agents of BSE and v-CJD are the same, and distinct from other forms of CJD in humans.

They found that the agent which causes BSE is able to "convert" human prion protein into a highly pathogenic form which damages the brain.

● Giuseppe Tesauro, an advocate-general of the European Court of Justice, has declared that the worldwide ban on British beef is not illegal, following claims by the British government that the European Commission had abused its powers in imposing a global block on UK exports.

In Brief

OPERATORS of the Sellafield nuclear plant in Cumbria were fined £32,500 and ordered to pay nearly £25,000 costs following a chemical leak into the Calder river that killed almost 15,000 fish.

MANY Territorial Army soldiers, including some serving in Bosnia, have not been paid for up to three months because of computer delays at the army pay centre, the Ministry of Defence admitted.

THE death toll from the west London rail crash last month rose to seven when Peter Allen, aged 65, died from his injuries in Charing Cross hospital. An investigation into the cause of the crash continues.

FORTY-EIGHT illegal immigrants were discovered inside the trailer of a lorry shortly after it arrived in Dover on a cross-Channel ferry — the second highest number caught trying to enter Britain in one group.

A PROPOSAL to house up to 210 asylum seekers in a floating hotel used by oil workers is being considered by council chiefs in London to alleviate the problem of 15,000 people being crammed into bed and-breakfast hotels while they await Home Office decisions on their future.

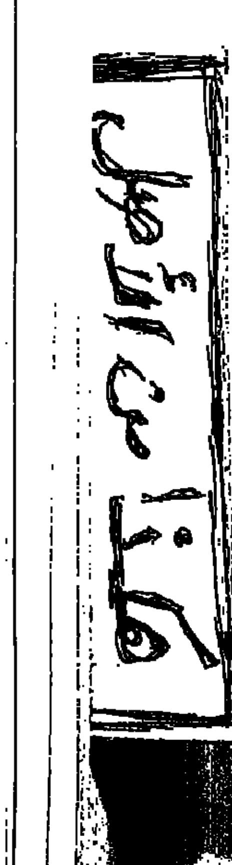
BUCKINGHAM PALACE condemned the rushed reissue of Andrew Morton's biography of Diana, Princess of Wales, as "particularly sad" coming so soon after her death. Doctors say the princess's death has been followed by an increase in the number of people suffering from depression.

DRIVING test applications are down by half since January when the test was made stiffer and the pass rate reduced.

THREE British soldiers accused of attacking a group of English tourists outside a discothèque in Ayia Napa, Cyprus, were acquitted after the prosecution dropped the charges against them.

A WOMAN convicted of killing her 14-month old severely handicapped daughter walked free after being given an 18-month jail sentence, suspended for two years. Her daughter had not been expected to live more than three more months. "I can only pass a suspended sentence these days if circumstances are exceptional," said the judge, Mr Justice Sachs. "They are."

GEORGE COOK, Britain's oldest man, who once admitted that he had smoked anything from boot laces to oak leaves since the age of 12, has died aged 108.



GUARDIAN WEEKLY October 5 1997

Straw targets youth crime

Alan Travis

JACK STRAW, the Home Secretary, last week published detailed plans to "break the excuse culture" surrounding youth crime, including legally forcing parents to control their delinquent children. Ministers claim the package adds up to the biggest shake-up for 50 years in tackling juvenile crime.

The overhaul follows last year's Audit Commission report which showed that the "youth justice system" cost a £1 billion a year to run, but was less effective at tackling crime than a decade ago.

Although the package puts much greater emphasis on the role of parents, Mr Straw also pointed at some schools, which, under the pressure of examinations and league tables, were too ready to exclude troublesome pupils.

Mr Straw acknowledged there was a clash of official policies between a threefold increase in school exclusions in the past four years and tackling youth crime. Talks have been going on at cabinet level with the Education Secretary, David Blunkett, on ways of tackling the problem. Research has shown that 58 per cent of those permanently excluded from school get involved in crime.

"What I am trying to break is this excuse culture that has developed, where a young offender seeks to excuse their behaviour," said Mr Straw. "None of us should evade our responsibilities for our children. You have got to get parents to accept their responsibilities. The earlier you get to these parents and children the better. That's why two of my proposals actually affect children below the age of criminal responsibility."

One of the main ways envisaged by Mr Straw is through a large expansion of parent education classes, now attended by about 40,000 people a year. The proposed legislation, to be introduced later this year, envisages the courts ordering parents of convicted child offenders who "wilfully refuse to accept their responsibilities" to go to "counselling and guidance sessions" once a week for three-month courses. This will also cover the parents of persistent school truants.

They may also face a court order lasting up to a year spelling out how they must control their children — by ensuring, for example, they are at home at certain hours or accompanied to and from school by a responsible adult. Parents who fail to comply face a rising penalty of fines and possible jail terms.

Mr Straw also indicated for the first time that the police cautioning system will be replaced by a reprimand for first offences followed by a final warning for a second offence which will trigger "an intervention package" by a youth offender team. If that fails, accelerated court action will follow.

The package was welcomed last week by the police, local authorities and penal reformers, although some lawyers warned against abolishing the medieval law of Doli Incapax, which requires the prosecution to prove a defendant aged under 14 knew he was doing wrong.

The president of the Police Superintendents' Association, Brian Mackenzie, said: "The final warning proposals are particularly useful, as our experience of repeated cautioning is that it causes juveniles to believe that they are 'untouchable'."

However, Harry Fletcher, of the National Association of Probation Officers, doubted that enforcing child curfews and using compulsion and threats of fines and imprisonment would change the behaviour of many parents.

● Almost one in three 14- and 15-year-olds have tried cannabis at least once, according to a new study by the Schools' Health Education Unit at Exeter university. The study found that fewer than three in 10 of those asked considered the drug to be dangerous.

Londoner held for war crimes

Christopher Elliott

A 76-YEAR-OLD former rail worker was last week arrested and charged with the alleged murder of five Jews in Belarus, part of the Soviet Union during the second world war.

Andrzej Sawoniuk, from east London, is only the second man to be charged in connection with alleged Nazi war crimes under the 1991 War Crimes Act.

Mr Sawoniuk's solicitor, Martin Lee, said last week that his client went voluntarily to Southwark police station, in south London, where he was arrested by officers of Scotland Yard's War Crimes Unit and charged. He was bailed to appear at Bow Street magistrates court on October 30.

"He is very, very upset and he strenuously denies the allegations," said Mr Lee.

The first man to be charged under the act was Szymon Serafinowicz. He was tried for alleged atrocities committed during the Nazi occupation of Belarus, but the case was dropped after a jury decided he was unfit to plead as he was suffering from senile dementia. He died earlier this year, aged 86.

Mr Sawoniuk, who is of Polish origin and came to Britain in 1946, is one of four people who have been investigated by the Yard's war crimes unit. They had been looking into his case for two years.

He is alleged to have committed the murders while part of a Nazi-led paramilitary police squad which killed about 3,000 Jews in the Domachevo area after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

The decision to prosecute was made after a file on the case was passed from the Crown Prosecution Service to the Attorney-General, John Morris. Mr Morris was a vocal critic of the war crimes legislation when in Opposition, voting against the bill which made it law.

Newspapers support new privacy rules

Kamal Ahmed

IN A fundamental break with the past, the newspaper industry last week agreed to sweeping reforms of rules governing privacy and harassment announced by Lord Wakeham, chairman of the Press Complaints Commission.

After a review sparked by the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, Lord Wakeham said that it was time for the industry to respond to the mood of the nation and be seen to put its house in order.

He said that photographs obtained by "persistent pursuit" should be banned, along with motorbike chases and payments for stories made to juveniles.

He added that the protection of children from press intrusion would be strengthened and that the operation of media "scrums" would be tightly controlled.

"We've listened and we've acted," Lord Wakeham said. "This new code will be the toughest set of industry regulations anywhere in Europe. It is doing far more than legislation ever could."

As part of his proposals, Lord Wakeham said that the area where a public figure could expect privacy should be extended to include restaurants, churches and some secluded beaches.

Newspapers will also have to establish an "over-riding" public interest defence if they have breached the code.

Editors broadly welcomed the plans, although disquiet has already been expressed in some circles that Lord Wakeham's proposals lacked detail.

It is likely that the new code will include a statement on a person's "entitlement" to privacy, rather than "right to privacy" as expressed in the European Convention on Human Rights.

The code will also demand that editors are able to prove where photographs are taken and in what circumstances and that children should be able to complete full-time education without unnecessary media intrusion.



Tunnel vision . . . one of seven deep tube shelters built for air raid protection in London during the second world war now being offered for sale by the Government

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID SILLITOE

Red meat carries risks

Christopher Elliott

PEOPLE should eat less red meat to reduce the risk of cancer, a Government committee recommended last week. An increase in vegetable and fibre consumption would also help.

After two years' research, the committee on the medical aspects of food and nutrition (COMA) recommended that those who eat an average 90g of red meat a day, less than a quarter-pound hamburger, should consider a reduction and those with a high intake of around 140g should definitely cut back.

The committee, which has been examining the links between diet and cancer in the UK, also stressed the importance of maintaining a healthy body weight and increasing intakes of a wide variety of fruit and vegetables, and fibre.

The results were echoed by a broader survey carried out by 15 experts for the World Cancer Research Fund, which reviewed 4,000 scientific studies and concluded that changing the diet could reduce the global incidence of cancer by 30-40 per cent a year. In Britain this could prevent 100,000 cases of cancer each year.

A healthy diet, together with regular exercise and maintaining a healthy body weight, could reduce the three most common cancers — cutting lung cancer cases by up to a third, halving breast cancer, and preventing three-quarters of colon cancers, according to the survey.

It says people should eat no more than 80g of red meat a day, and recommends a daily intake of 400-800g of fruit and vegetables, and 600-800g of cereals and pulses, combined with an hour's brisk walk, no alcohol and no smoking.

Professor John Potter, who chaired the panel of experts, said that at least 30 of the studies showed consistent evidence linking the eating of red meat to colon cancer.

Ethnic psychosis bias refuted

David Brindle

YOUNG black men are no more likely than average to suffer schizophrenia or other serious mental illness, the biggest survey of its kind indicates.

Previous studies have shown Afro-Caribbeans to be three to five times more likely to be treated for acute psychosis. This week's report, based on interviews with more than 8,000 people — as opposed to treatment rates — questions a basic assumption in provision of mental health services for ethnic minorities.

Its author, James Nazroo, said: "Urgent investigation is needed into any possible differences in the ways white and Caribbean people with psychosis are treated . . . Caribbean men are far more likely to be admitted to hospital, compulsorily treated and treated in secure wards."

Earlier research has indicated very high rates of schizophrenia among black men born in Britain. Theories have included genetic predisposition and the effects of habitual marijuana use.

The survey was part of a wider study of ethnic minority groups by the Policy Studies Institute and Social and Community Research. More than 5,000 black and Asian people were interviewed, and almost 3,000 whites.

Although people classified as Caribbean were found to have a higher than average rate of psychosis, this rate was less than twice that found among whites and was attributed wholly to women. There was almost no difference between black and white men.

The survey did find a higher rate of depression among Caribbeans than whites — twice as high among men — although previous studies have shown far fewer blacks receive treatment for it.

● Afro-Caribbean schoolchildren are up to six times more likely to be expelled than white schoolchildren, the Commission for Racial Equality says in a report. "Governors may be held accountable if breaches of the Race Relations Act or other laws take place in their school or college," the commission warns.

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Rights know no frontier

SAUDI ARABIA should not be surprised at the outrage over the sentences passed on the two British nurses, even though these are still subject to appeal. No one could reasonably object to judicial decisions reached after a process of open trial, and resulting in punishment that accords with modern humane standards. This case fails on both counts. There may be an argument as to whether public protest is the most effective way of influencing appeals. In reacting so quickly to the flogging sentence passed on Lucille McLauchlan, the British Foreign Secretary has rejected the Foreign Office's tradition of quiet intercession. But that is a separate argument about diplomacy, not morality: and the grounds for a moral judgment here are clear.

The Saudi ambassador last week reminded British critics that this case arose because "a hideous crime has been committed and an innocent woman brutally murdered". That is not in dispute. But in a world that seeks to improve standards of humanity, even those charged with the worst crimes have the right to be tried fairly and, if guilty, punished humanely. There is a general presumption that trials should be open except in special circumstances, which cannot be said to apply to the current case. And the need for humane punishment was acknowledged soon after the war when the United Nations General Assembly adopted without dissent the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: this includes the provision that "no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment". Saudi Arabia was a founding member of the UN. The same provision was incorporated into the 1966 International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, adopted unanimously by the Assembly — which again included Saudi Arabia.

It is impossible to regard punishment by lashing as anything other than "inhuman and degrading". Capital punishment — the possible fate for Deborah Parry — is a more difficult issue. Amnesty International insists that it is by its very nature inhumane, and campaigns against its use in all circumstances. The validity of such a position — which would require the United States to be censured as much as China or Saudi Arabia — seems compelling but may have to be put on one side here. For UN safeguards agreed in 1984 provide that where capital punishment does occur, it shall be carried out "so as to inflict the minimum possible suffering". This is evidently not the case, both in terms of physical and mental suffering, in Saudi Arabia, where the head is severed from the body in a ritual of public execution. The spectacle of the relatives of the deceased apparently bargaining for a cash payment, in return for which they will request commutation of the death sentence, is also deeply disturbing.

It is impossible to consider this case without being aware of the wider political context. Saudi Arabia is, we must suppose, an ally of Great Britain — it certainly was during the Gulf war. It is said to be some sort of guarantor of stability in the Middle East. It is an excellent customer for British goods and services, particularly British arms. But neither trade, dubious or otherwise, nor the undoubted fact that Britain's own system of justice could be improved, should inhibit criticism in this unhappy case.

Smoking out Asia's miracle

FOREST FIRES can be a natural phenomenon that may even contribute to the life cycle of the land. But not in Indonesia, where huge tracts of land are in flames entirely due to reckless human behaviour. All over Southeast Asia the haze it causes, combined with other forms of pollution, is creating a cocktail of noxious smog. And all over Southeast Asia an equally poisonous mix of commercial greed and lax controls is leading towards what may become an even greater environmental disaster.

Indonesia is not the only culprit, but under the Suharto regime it presents a particularly instructive lesson in the downside of economic growth, Asian-style. Three months ago Indonesia's minister of the environment spoke emphatically at the United Nations Earth Summit in favour of an international treaty to regulate the world's forests. One month ago President Suharto made a personal visit to Borneo to open a new pulp mill in East Kalimantan owned by one of his closest associates. Indonesia should "take advantage of growing demand for pulp in the world market," said Suharto. The mismatch between these two initiatives is painfully obvious — and the biggest forest fires are the ones now burning in Indonesian Borneo. Nor is this the first disaster of its kind. From autumn 1982 to summer 1983, fire consumed more than 8.6 million acres of rainforest in East Kalimantan, enveloping almost all of Borneo in a pall of smoke. This, too, was blamed on the shifting El Niño Pacific current, but the government in Jakarta swore that new laws against deforestation would ensure that it never happened again. The laws have never been properly enforced, and the logging companies have grown from a handful to more than a hundred — with friends in high places.

Logging to clear land for pulp plantations as well as to extract existing timber has depleted forests in many other Asian countries. They have been reduced to fragments in Thailand, and are disappearing fast in Cambodia, Laos and Burma. China has despoiled large tracts of Tibetan forests and in China proper the pressure has been increased by rising consumer demand for furniture and fuel. Forest cover along the Himalayan foothills, in Malaysia and the Philippines has also been severely degraded.

The smog now affecting urban centres among Indonesia's neighbours is much worse than in previous years of forest fires because it combines with other forms of atmospheric pollution — particularly from vehicle exhausts — which are also on the increase. It is a timely warning that nature cannot be tampered with indefinitely. But the lesson from Indonesia is that pious intentions are no match for the predatory imperatives of commerce and corruption. When the "Asian miracle" has faded, who will replant Asia's forests?

Counting your chooks

THE PASTMASTER of Australian parliamentary rhetoric, Paul Keating, might well call his successors "dimwits who couldn't raffle a chook in a pub". (That's chook as in chicken.) Two ministers under the prime minister, John Howard, have had difficulties in remembering where they slept on a particular night. Last week the science minister, millionaire farmer Peter McGauran, resigned after admitting he had wrongly claimed about A$1,500 ($1,085) in travel allowances for several occasions when he was sound asleep at home. He also claimed for the cost of a plane trip he never took. The transport minister John Sharp also stepped down last week for similar reasons, taking with him two of Mr Howard's aides who had become caught up in the affair. It is only two months since Geoff Prosser, the small business minister, resigned over allegations of a conflict of business interests, and less than a year since Mr Howard lost two other junior ministers over similar allegations.

Such errors were not unknown under Mr Keating's own administration. But these incidents jar with an Australian self-image of superior probity that has already irritated its neighbours. Mr Howard's government was recently embarrassed when a secret document describing several Pacific countries in insulting terms was left on a conference table. It named some island leaders as drunks and lickspittles, and accused several of corruption. This sort of gaffe only provides fuel for a very different perception of Australia as still, precisely, a Western nation with colonial attitudes. Southeast Asian countries have also expressed alarm at the attention given in the Australian press to Pauline Hanson, the independent MP who claims that Australia is in danger of being "swamped by Asians". Mr Howard's attempt to dismiss her arguments, while asserting that Australia was a society where "sensitive issues" could be discussed freely, went down badly.

Mr Howard's reaction to the latest embarrassment has been to attack the opposition and insist he will win the next election. Yet he came to power last year promising new standards of public rectitude. Though Mr Keating resigned from parliament last year, his Labor party has started to outstrip Mr Howard's Liberal-National coalition in the polls. In charge of a country that is still ambivalent about who and where it is, Mr Howard will have to do better than this, both at home and abroad.

Algeria drowning in an orgy of bloodletting

David Hirst

THE thing that most shocks about the Algerian civil war is its terrifying ferocity, its wanton barbarity and, above all perhaps, the fact that on the insurgents' side it is ostensibly conducted in the name of one of the world's great religions. That commands the headlines, since this is a war the outside world knows so little about. It is conducted far from international scrutiny, both because of the inherent difficulty of covering such a conflict and because the regime so rigorously excludes or controls the outside observer.

Only occasional glimpses of these atrocities are vouchsafed to us. Last week's massacre came to our attention because it took place on the very edge of the capital, which made it impossible for the regime to hide. Yet even these glimpses are sufficient and familiar enough to reduce the frightful inhumanity to a kind of banality. At Bentalha the 40 gunmen, presumably members of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), did nothing particularly unusual for them when they cut the throats of 200 women and children, or burned them to death.

And that in spite of the fact that they are clearly forever in search of fresh refinements of extremism, cruelty and barbarism, or — more interestingly perhaps — the ideological justification for it. If this suggests that Algerians have a natural bent for extremism, historians and sociologists tend to agree.

It makes for a striking contrast with that other North African country, Egypt, with a serious Islamist insurgency. Where Egypt has all the gentleness associated with a sedentary agrarian society, Algeria has all the sharp passions of desert tribalism. This natural disposition has been exacerbated by recent historical experience. There was the extremism, cruelty and massive cultural disruption of French colonial conquest and occupation. Then there was the barbarism of the anti-colonial liberation war, which, in addition to the mistrust of the foreigner, left a perhaps even more bitter legacy of internal animosities, caused by such fratricidal violence as the massacre of tens of thousands of *harkis*, or pro-French collaborators, in the aftermath of independence.

It is natural to compare and contrast Egypt's and Algeria's Islamist terror. In Egypt, the government has "contained" its insurgents, now largely confining them to the Upper Egyptian provinces from where they first came. While it would be wrong to attribute the contrast with Algerian counterparts entirely to the extremist temper of the people, it is an important reason. And it is certainly true that extremism is now dictating the course of the struggle.

It is not just the extremism the world most hears about, that of the Islamic fanatics. It is that of the regime as well. The military-backed government of General Liamin Zeroual proclaims itself a believer in secularism, democracy, pluralism, and all the basic Western-style freedoms. But, in reality, the hardline generals are little more wedded, in their behaviour, to the true spirit of democracy and tolerance than the GIA are representative exponents of the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed.

There is much that is obscure, almost indecipherable in this barbarous civil war. Many elements of it — some of them, such as clan, family and community vendettas that are rooted in the country's harsh history — have grafted themselves on to the central struggle. They greatly exacerbate and widen it, and render its eventual outcome all the more unpredictable.

That central struggle is between the regime and its public constituency on the one hand and, on the other, the Islamist movement, both the original Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and the GIA fanatics who grew up in its shadow. It is a consistent, ongoing reality at the heart of much that is so chaotic and obscure. Almost as consistent is the secondary struggle to which it gives rise, that which the extremists in both camps wage against their own moderates. This is sometimes only latent, or low-level, but it always takes on a more intense, often murderous form, whenever it looks as though the moderates of either camp are groping towards some basis for negotiation.

And that, clearly, is the case now. For months the regime has been engaged in secret talks with the FIS, and its military arm, the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), already in a state of de facto truce with the army. In July, it released the FIS's "historic chief", Sheikh Abbas Madani, from jail. It seems to have been a much more serious initiative than usual, in that Gen Zeroual and the moderates had succeeded in winning the involvement of some of the generals usually associated with the regime's "eradicationist" faction.

BUT WITHIN six weeks of his release Madani was told to stop all political activities. His crime? In response to an appeal by United Nations secretary general, Kofi Annan, for tolerance and dialogue in Algeria, he had declared himself "ready to launch an appeal for an end to the bloodshed". That was apparently too much the generals, fiercely opposed to the internationalisation of a conflict they have always deemed to be their exclusive preserve.

Meanwhile, in the Islamist camp, the cleavage between the FIS and its dissident, demonic GIA offspring has been growing steadily. By merely working for a ceasefire, Madani was provoking a comparable reaction from the GIA.

It resorted to yet more massacres, and, if possible, to more atrocious ones. But the really alarming thing is their location in the capital itself. Is it because the army is now so weak and overstretched? Or is it because eradicators and Islamist fanatics have gone beyond what was already obvious — that they serve each other's purpose in sabotaging the moderates' plans — to reach the point of operational collaboration or at least inter-penetration?

Neither explanation bodes well for the regime. One suggests that it is not very far from being overwhelmed; the other that it is so rent by divisions that it could disintegrate from within. One thing is sure: its fall would make all current massacres pale into insignificance.

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October 5 1997

Le Monde

Algeria warns UN off its 'internal affair'

Afsané Bassir Pour in New York

FOR the moment it seems unlikely that the United Nations will be able to play a role in the Algerian crisis. But the latest massacre of up to 200 people on the outskirts of the capital, Algiers, during the night of September 22 has sparked fresh debate among officials and delegates attending the UN's General Assembly.

The UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, after a long discussion with advisers, condemned the massacre as a "brutal act of terrorism". On August 29, he had taken the unprecedented step of calling for "tolerance and dialogue" between the parties in Algeria, and said the situation there had been treated for too long as an internal affair.

At the time the Algerian government reacted with "surprise and disapproval" and demanded an explanation for Annan's intervention in the "internal affairs of a sovereign state".

Annan explained his point of view in a conversation with Algeria's president, Liamine Zeroual, on September 3. Accounts of what they said vary considerably. "Annan was perfectly aware he had no role to play in Algeria," New York-based Algerian diplomats have told Le Monde. "We've been given assurances that it's out of the question for Annan to intervene again in our internal affairs: the matter is closed."

But, as human rights organisations and an increasing number of UN diplomats have noted, Annan's intervention broke a taboo. The Algerian crisis is now something that can be talked about.

"His appeal seems to have stirred people's consciences," said one diplomat. "It also emerged that the Algerian government's strategy of refusing any mediation or internationalisation of the conflict has the support of several leading countries, including France and the United States."

Diplomats are concerned that, since Annan received dozens of letters of encouragement, including one from the leaders of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), his determination to exert his moral authority may be "exploited" by the various parties involved.

"The Algerian security forces may not have completely clean hands, but the Islamists are no angels either," says a diplomat. Another diplomat familiar with the Algerian problem says UN mediation is "out of the question" because, in Annan's words, "it takes two to tango".

But Annan did raise the possibility of an independent inquiry into the massacres, which could in theory be requested by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Algerian government's claim that the conflict is an internal matter is rejected by all human rights organisations and some UN officials.

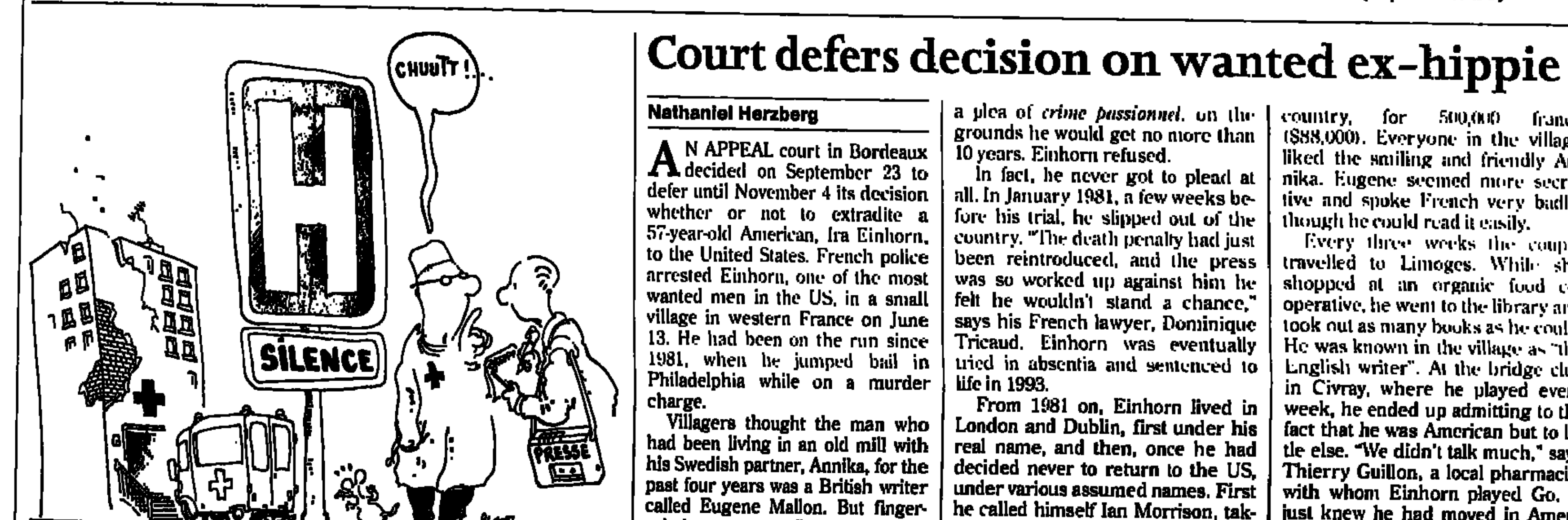
"For Algeria not to want Annan to intervene is one thing, but it can't talk about UN interference," says a diplomat, who points out that for several years now the UN "has intervened only in internal conflicts and not in wars between states — because there aren't any."

Amnesty International's North Africa spokesman, Abderrahim Sabir, says that "after tens of thousands of deaths it's high time the Algerian government admitted that the protection of human rights is no longer an internal matter".

Amnesty International, in a statement released in London, deplored the fact that the Algerian government systematically made accusations against those who expressed concern about the human rights situation in that country.

The Algerian government has decided to remain silent. The crisis has not come up for discussion at the General Assembly, which has been in session since September 22. But it will be on the agenda on October 1, when the Algerian foreign minister, Ahmed Attaf, takes the rostrum.

(September 25)



Speaking up on health care

EDITORIAL

THE French government urgently needs to restructure France's hospital network in such a way as to make it more reliable. The monthly Sciences et Avenir magazine spent 18 months investigating some 1,500 hospitals. The report it published, which lists 478 hospitals where serious malfunctions were observed, confirms the size and difficulty of the task now facing the government.

Certain specialists will challenge some of the conclusions drawn by the magazine, in particular its recommendation that all maternity hospitals carrying out fewer than 300 deliveries a year should be closed. But the investigation, based on official health service documents, has revealed serious problems that were partly obscured by a secretive and ineffectual administrative system.

All those involved in health — the government, local authorities, hospital managers and doctors — should immediately try to learn the lessons of the investigation rather than play down its significance or attack its imperfections.

The health minister, Bernard Kouchner, said that the government was determined to sweep away what he called "hush-hush hospitals". He called for "transparency", and said that the government would aim "to reduce disparities in the supply and quality of health care".

The problem is indeed one of equal access to care. All the maps published by Sciences et Avenir show wide regional disparities, which mean that the chances of not getting properly treated vary considerably depending on the *département* or town in which people live.

There is no easy answer. The most urgent thing is to introduce incentives to decrease medical "overpopulation" in some regions (such as the Greater Paris) and thus benefit regions where the provision of medical care is inadequate.

The government must also quickly find a way to remedy the alarming decline in the number of medical students intending to become anaesthetists or obstetricians. Irrespective of such issues as pay or professional standing, such specialists are often worried — even obsessed — by the possibility that they may one day be held legally responsible for a clinical accident. Any restructuring of the hospital system should therefore also include legislation on compensation for clinical risk.

(September 25)

Court defers decision on wanted ex-hippie

Nathaniel Herzberg

AN APPEAL court in Bordeaux decided on September 23 to defer until November 4 its decision whether or not to extradite a 57-year-old American, Ira Einhorn, to the United States. French police arrested Einhorn, one of the most wanted men in the US, in a small village in western France on June 13. He had been on the run since 1981, when he jumped bail in Philadelphia while on a murder charge.

Villagers thought the man who had been living in an old mill with his Swedish partner, Annika, for the past four years was a British writer called Eugene Mallon. But fingerprinting soon confirmed that the man French police had arrested was in fact Einhorn.

Ira Samuel Einhorn, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, was a leading figure in the hippie movement of the early 1960s. His friends included Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. A fierce opponent of the war in Vietnam and an environmental activist, he organised the first Earth Day in 1970.

When hippiedom went out of fashion, Einhorn became a charismatic figure in the newly fledged New Age movement. He took a keen interest in physics and futurology, and befriended not only Uri Geller, but serious scientists and writers such as Arthur Koestler and Philip K Dick.

On his return from one of many trips to eastern and western Europe in March 1979, Einhorn was arrested. His one-time girlfriend Holly Maddux had been missing for 18 months. Her parents had asked two retired FBI agents to investigate her disappearance.

Einhorn's neighbours told them they had smelt a strong stench seeping out of his flat. Police searched the flat and found the young woman's decomposed body in a trunk. Einhorn swore he was innocent and claimed he had been framed by the CIA. He said compromising documents on Russian and American arms, which he had kept in the trunk, were missing.

His lawyers had no difficulty in raising the $40,000 he needed to get bail until his trial. The evidence against him was damning, and his lawyers begged him to put forward a plea of *crime passionnel*, on the grounds he would get no more than 10 years. Einhorn refused.

In fact, he never got to plead at all. In January 1981, a few weeks before his trial, he slipped out of the country. "The death penalty had just been reintroduced, and the press was so worked up against him he felt he wouldn't stand a chance," says his French lawyer, Dominique Tricaud. Einhorn was eventually tried in absentia and sentenced to life in 1993.

From 1981 on, Einhorn lived in London and Dublin, first under his real name, and then, once he had decided never to return to the US, under various assumed names. First he called himself Ian Morrison, taking the surname of his new girlfriend, who had followed him to Europe. Then he became Ben Moore.

He enrolled at the library of Trinity College, Dublin, and became part of the poet Seamus Heaney's circle of friends. When the future Nobel Prize winner was questioned by police in 1987, he confirmed he had known Einhorn well, describing him as a "very cultured man, if a little eccentric".

Einhorn had just given the Irish police the slip. He went to England, the Balearic Islands and Switzerland, and then returned to London. He was able to finance his trips with money sent by an old friend, Barbara Bronfman, the extremely wealthy wife of an heir to the Seagram fortune.

At the end of 1987, Einhorn met Annika Flodin, a young Swedish fashion designer. He explained the fix he was in. She suggested she could help him. Ira and Annika spent a year in Stockholm, until an indiscretion put the police on their trail. But by the time they came knocking at Annika's door, Ira had already gone.

The couple went into hiding in Denmark and England. Ben Moore became Ben Mallon, then Eugene Mallon, the name of an Irish bookseller with whom Einhorn had once been friends, and whose birth certificate he had managed to obtain. Annika Flodin became Annika Mallon when they married in 1992.

In 1993, Annika sold her Stockholm flat, and the couple bought a former mill near the village of Champagne-Mouton, in Cognac country, for 500,000 francs ($88,000). Everyone in the village liked the smiling and friendly Annika. Eugene seemed more secretive and spoke French very badly, though he could read it easily.

Every three weeks the couple travelled to Limoges. While she shopped at an organic food co-operative, he went to the library and took out as many books as he could. He was known in the village as "the English writer". At the bridge club in Civray, where he played every week, he ended up admitting to the fact that he was American but to little else. "We didn't talk much," says Thierry Guillon, a local pharmacist with whom Einhorn played Go. "I just knew he had moved in American academic circles."

Daniel Antoine, an architect and environmental activist, says: "We're trying to stop a nuclear waste dump being built here. He gave me some advice, explaining that he had been an activist himself."

IN MAY, following a CBS television Unsolved Mysteries programme on Einhorn and a fresh US request for information, Swedish police came up with a piece of evidence that had not been exploited. In 1994, Annika Flodin had asked them for a copy of her driving licence. She gave her married name and address in France. The information was passed on to Richard Di Benedetto, the policeman in Philadelphia who had been following Einhorn's tracks from the beginning. The rest was child's play.

Annika visits her husband three times a week at Gradignan prison. She has organised a support group and collected a large number of signatures. "Ira can't be guilty," she says. "He's a profoundly non-violent person, and much too smart to leave a corpse in his apartment for a year. And even if he were guilty, he'd be entitled to a fair trial, wouldn't he?"

Under US law there can be no appeal against sentences passed in absentia. The Bordeaux appeal court announced on September 23 that it would not extradite Einhorn unless it received assurances that he would be entitled to a fresh trial on his return. It gave the American authorities until November 4 to provide further "explanations".

(September 23)

Jodie Foster talks to **Samuel Blumenfeld** about how her life impinges on her roles — rather than vice versa

In Contact – and firmly in control

VERY few famous child actresses succeed, as Natalie Wood and Elizabeth Taylor did, in remaining stars once they become adults. Jodie Foster shares their distinction. Indeed, so successful has she been that she is one of the few Hollywood actresses who can get a film project up and running simply by her presence in the cast.

One of the reasons things have worked out so well for Foster is that she has managed to inject an element of autobiography into her recent films, from Jonathan Demme's The Silence Of The Lambs to Robert Zemeckis's Contact (just released in France), where her contribution as an actress can clearly be sensed. On top of that, she has diversified her talent by also working as a director and a producer.

Do you see any parallel between your role in Contact — where you play a young scientist who was deeply scarred by her father's death when she was a teenager — and earlier films of yours like Nell, The Silence Of The Lambs and Little Man Tate?

I often say that I always make the same movie. In Contact there's the recurring theme of the child prodigy, a person who stands apart from others because of her excellence, who has lost both her parents, and who had a particularly significant relationship with her father. So I'm aware of all those aspects.

It's also a convention of myth — a character who has lost her parents and who, in a particular set of circumstances, goes on an internal journey.

Why are you almost always interested in the same character?

I guess I must be seeking on the screen what I haven't obtained in life. I had no father, whereas I've had all sorts of fathers in films. I often play complicated human beings, and I like to see their childhood as an explanation for the way they behave.

I also develop other aspects, such as the notion that in anyone's life there comes a moment which cannot be described or documented, and which one experiences alone, without being able to share it with anyone. You find that again in Contact, with Ellie's trip to the planet Vega, and in Home For The Holidays, the second movie I directed.

I think the contact I have with a director I'm going to work with is enormously important. It's vital he allows me to collaborate with him. An actor's task is to provide the director with the greatest possible number of approaches to a scene.

How have you coped with the fact that you were a gifted child who started performing at the age of three, before becoming a film star when you were 10?

I came to terms very early on with the fact I was different. But I could have been different in other ways — by being, say, the daughter of an ambassador to China or a militiaman in the former Yugoslavia. Being an actress is just one of several choices, and one that necessarily alienates you, like any other choice. The fact that Ellie Harroway in Contact feels alone does not necessarily mean she has come unstuck or is neurotic. I hope the same could be said of me.

The careers of most children who become film stars end when they are about 15-16. How did you make the transition?

Children are often expected to give screen performances that are different from those of adults. That is the most difficult transition to make. You can be a very gifted child actor and incapable of making a career as an adult. It's easy to let yourself go when you are young, but it's not so easy once you're an adult. I really don't know how I managed to make that transition.

When I was a teenager, the way I acted could not have been described as immature. I was more like someone of 20. My mother also succeeded in managing my career intelligently, by choosing complex roles for me that went against my doll-like image.

She decided that from the age of seven onwards I would do no more commercials. At 11, I stopped appearing in television soaps. It wasn't such an easy decision, as it meant I spent many months without shooting.



Jodie Foster: a prodigious talent PHOTOGRAPH: BRIGITTE LACOMBE

At the time, were you aware of a difference between the bad movies you were in, like Napoleon And Samantha and Freaky Friday, and the better ones, like Alice Doesn't Live Here Any More and Taxi Driver?

Yes. In the case of the young hooker in Taxi Driver, I fully realised the character wasn't me. She had a different body language and a different past. It was the first time anyone had asked me to play a part like that, whereas before that I had to be content with merely looking natural. No one had ever made any demands on me before.

I also wonder what might have become of me if I hadn't decided to break off my career and go to university. Everything you do between the ages of 17 and 21 is very important. I found myself in a place where I had to get to the core of things and reject the superficial.

What lesson did you learn from the bad patch you went through in the eighties, when you appeared in a string of poor movies?

There were one or two good movies as well, but they didn't make a cent. I really like Tony Richardson's The Hotel New Hampshire, as well as Tony Bill's Five Corners. When you're young and relatively little known, you can afford to notch up three or four flops. That would no longer be the case today.

You make about one movie a year, which is very little compared with other actresses. How do you spend the rest of your time?

Living, cooking, going to the post office, doing yoga, reading . . . Working more than once a year seems to me to interfere with the proper running of my life. I think actors who shoot several films a year have nothing to say. They get off their plane and go straight into make-up, then they go from make-up to the canteen.

If I'm not allowed to live my life, I begin to hate the cinema. I can't help it, but I always feel different from other people. It's my absurd romantic side.

I don't go out or attend meetings much in Hollywood, which is not necessarily a good thing. It's just that at 8pm I feel like going home. The idea of going to a premiere makes me feel sick because it gives me the feeling I'm still on the job, whereas I only work from 9am to 6pm.

Most people working in Hollywood only go out with their own circle of friends. I find that appalling. If I were in their shoes, I'd feel as if I were stuck in a tunnel.

What do you think of the way Hollywood is going?

There are good things and bad things. We're living in strange times: the economy of the movie industry has become globalised, and so many films get made it's impossible to maintain a good average level of quality. And we export the whole lot. Of the 10 movies that come out each week there's perhaps one that's OK. I think the public is beginning to get fed up with entertainment movies.

But it is also true that actors and directors have much more independence than they used to. That means that certain movies produced by the majors are more interesting.

Does this flaw in the system explain why you get offered so few interesting parts?

I don't think so. I'm currently in a position to do as I like. By working on only one film a year, I allow myself the luxury of getting really involved in the parts I play. And there were far fewer female roles 10 years ago. When I was a kid, I was struck by how few women I met on set. There'd be someone playing my mother, and the make-up artist, and that's all.

You've set up a production company, Egg Pictures. What are your aims?

I'm not very ambitious. I want to produce very few movies, but ones with a very strong content and a certain commercial potential. My aim is not to become a much-fêted producer, but rather to help young directors get their projects off the ground in an unhostile environment.

I can also produce my own movies, which allows me to save time. It also means, paradoxically, that I'm more demanding than I might otherwise be.

(September 18)

From artistic grids to prison bars

REVIEW
Jean-Michel Frodon

ARTEMISIA, a film by Agnès Merlet, describes the early career of the first woman painter to be celebrated in art history, Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653). She worked in the shadow of two male painters: her father Orazio Gentileschi, and her teacher, Agostino Tassi.

Merlet is a young woman director who attracted attention with her first feature, Le Fils du Requin, in 1994. The parallel between the young woman painter and the director, and the interplay of resonances between painting and the cinema, are just two of the clichés that the film delights in debunking.

At first sight everything seems straightforward. We think we are going to get a polished and upmarket historical reconstruction, informed by culture and feminism, of the kind endlessly churned out by the French film industry.

It looks as if the beautiful young Artemisia (Valentina Cervi) will embody not only an art that is about to break out of the studio and portray its subjects from nature, but an emancipated woman trapped in a macho society opposed to change.

On the one hand, there is the supportive father (Michel Serrault), who defends her talent and rails against the aesthetic and sexist blinkers of the artistic establishment, but tries to clip her wings the moment she takes her aspirations as woman and artist to their logical conclusion. On the other, there is the painter Tassi (Miki Manojlovic), Artemisia's mentor and lover, who is charged with raping her. The storyline chugs along cosily: no one nowadays would say they were against greater artistic freedom or the right of women to express themselves.

This conformist "heritage" storyline made it possible to mount an expensive European co-production of the kind not normally entrusted to a young director with only one feature under her belt.

But things are not quite as simple as that: the film constantly tries to break loose from its well-ordered structure. Merlet finds ingenious ways of disrupting the decorative, demonstrative and emotional edifice that seems to be taking shape.

The framing has an unstable, almost reportage-like quality that cancels out any potential picture-postcard prettiness. Similarly, Merlet adopts a "contemporary" approach in her direction of the actors, which results in Serrault giving a straightforward, taut performance instead of putting on one of his usual histrionic *tours de force*.

Above all, Merlet gets the very best out of Cervi, who gives a gutsy and startling performance. She helps Merlet to turn Artemisia into a real character rather than just an archetype or symbol.

Quite apart from its metaphors, the film is sustained by an element of mystery. This is to be found, for example, in the parallel between the grid device that Tassi uses when teaching Artemisia the laws of perspective and the bars of the prison through which he looks after being jailed.

At that point blood trickles from Tassi's fingers — real blood, whereas what we saw on the Artemisia's fingers, after she lost her virginity, was not blood but red paint. It is here that the film addresses the essential question of the relationship between artistic creation and the real world. It is a question that has been central to novel-writing for two and a half centuries.

It is also a question that has teased several modern film-makers, from Jacques Rivette, in Wuthering Heights and La Belle Noiseuse, to André Téchiné, in The Brontë Sisters (which has much in common with Merlet's Artemisia), and François Truffaut, in Les Deux Anglaises et Le Continent.

(September 11)

Le Monde
Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

Little Rock Nine Return to School

Peter Baker in Little Rock

FROM THE outside, the building looks much the same, a massive fortress of brick and stone. The tall, arched doorways are still watched over by four statues labeled Ambition, Personality, Opportunity and Preparation.

But this time when nine black children of the Old South slowly mounted the steps of Central High School, there was no jeering white mob, no soldiers with bayonets, no governor vowing to stop them. Instead, the current governor and a former governor, now the president of the United States, held open the glass-paned wooden doors to welcome them inside.

The symbolic gesture was intended as a powerful statement of racial progress in America, a moment that President Clinton last week called "unbelievable," and in 1957 it would have been. Forty years to the day after those terrified teenagers integrated Arkansas' all-white flagship school under military escort, the "Little Rock Nine" returned to mark one of the most dramatic episodes in U.S. history — and at the same time provoke a soul-searching examination of how far the nation has come since then.

"At this schoolhouse door today, let us rejoice in the long way we have come these 40 years," said Clinton, who was an 11-year-old boy in a segregated school 50 miles away in Hot Springs at the time. However, warning of resegregation, he added, "Let us resolve to stand on the shoulders of the Little Rock Nine and press on with confidence in the hard and noble work ahead."

The anniversary of the Little Rock dispute came in the middle of Clinton's year-long campaign for racial reconciliation, and the conversation that has taken place in his home state in recent weeks has vividly exposed the sorts of troublesome issues that confront the president in translating high-minded intentions into concrete results.

The willingness to call attention to the volatile battle over integration indicates that this once-provincial southern city finally is ready to come to grips with its past, according to civic leaders. Yet, to some local African Americans, all the pomp has a sour taste — a "farce," in the words of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People — at a time when race still divides Little Rock and the country. The executive committee of the Little Rock Branch of the NAACP voted not to support or participate in the Central High celebration.

"It's not about race relations and reconciliation," said Joy Springer, 40, a paralegal who participates as a monitor in a long-running school desegregation case. "It's about the city of Little Rock and the Chamber of Commerce bringing in money . . . to better the power structure. This is just hype, a public relations sort of thing, to say, 'We want to show the world that Little Rock is on the way to solving the problem' . . . They want you to believe that."

Central High was an emotional touchstone in its time. In the wake of the Supreme Court's ruling, nine black students were chosen to be the first to attend Central High in the fall of 1957, only to be turned away at the door.

The staunch segregationist Gov. Orval E. Faubus (D) called out the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the students from enrolling, setting off a tense standoff with President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who ultimately federalized the Guard and dispatched another 1,000 troops from the 101st Airborne Division to enforce a court order admitting the students.

The grainy, black-and-white television images from those days were etched upon the consciousness of a generation, including those of a young Bill Clinton — the snarling mob, the threats of lynching, the pained but proud expression of 15-year-old Elizabeth Eckford as she silently faced those who spat on her because of her color. "It was Little Rock that made racial equality a driving obsession in my life," Clinton said.

Getting in the door was not the end of the turmoil for the students, though. Throughout that first year, they found themselves shunned, shoved against lockers, tripped down stairways. "The larger community immediately began assaulting our character, our bodies, in an attempt to suffocate our spirits, to drive us back from where we came," recalled Ernest Green, who became perhaps the best known of the Little Rock Nine through a television movie made about his life. "I believe now as I did then, they didn't really know us."

They do now. The names of Green, Eckford, Melba Pattillo Beals, Terrance Roberts and the others are part of history. One by one last week they approached the door that was once such a barrier and were greeted warmly by Clinton and Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee (R). Minnijean Brown Trickey was so overwhelmed she reached out to the president and Huckabee for support as she entered the building.

Lesson from history . . . Ernest Green and President Clinton embrace after the ceremony to commemorate the admission of black students into Central High School in 1957 PHOTOGRAPH: WIN McNAMEE

CIA Says Egypt Abducted Libya Dissident

Jim Hoagland

THE Central Intelligence Agency has developed convincing evidence that Egyptian agents staged the 1993 abduction in Cairo of a prominent Libyan dissident and U.S. resident, who was then turned over to the Libyan regime of Col. Moammar Gadhafi, according to U.S. officials.

Following a four-year investigation, the CIA told the Clinton administration this summer it had confirmed for the first time that Mansour Kikhia was taken to Libya and executed there by the government of Gadhafi, a bitter American adversary whom Washington has long accused of sponsoring international terrorism.

Kikhia's wife is a U.S. citizen. The former Libyan diplomat, who had lived in the United States for 13 years, was four months away from receiving U.S. citizenship when he was kidnapped.

The reported participation in the abduction by Egypt, a key U.S. ally in the Middle East and the recipient of $2 billion annually in American aid, has roiled relations between Washington and the government of President Hosni Mubarak, although the Clinton administration has resisted speaking publicly about the case until asked for comment on this article.

Senior U.S. officials, including Vice President Gore, last month demanded privately that Mubarak order an investigation into the Egyptian role in Kikhia's abduction. A U.S. official said that previous White House requests to Mubarak for information, beginning in 1993, produced only "some cooperation."

Kikhia, who defected to the United States in 1980, served as Gadhafi's foreign minister and ambassador to the United Nations before turning into a sharp critic of the regime. He disappeared from a Cairo hotel on December 10, 1993, while attending a meeting of an Arab human rights organization he had helped to found.

Though it has played a key role in the Middle East peace process, Egypt has been under growing attack in Congress for its support of Gadhafi and violation of United Nations sanctions against Libya. Mubarak's government has worked for several years to end a United Nations ban on air travel to and from Libya, imposed in 1992 because of Libyan involvement in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. Cairo was instrumental in a vote last month by the Arab League in Cairo to defy the ban.

U.S. officials interviewed over the past few days have attributed their reluctance to discuss Kikhia's fate to the sensitive intelligence that the case involves. But some acknowledged that sensitivity over criticizing Egypt publicly now is also a factor in the government's reticence.

Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright favored taking a fresh, no-holds-barred look at the Kikhia case, and blaming Egypt publicly for failing to cooperate fully if that was justified, when she was first told of the new CIA data in early August.

But as she moved closer to making her first trip to the Middle East last month — which included a stopover in Egypt — discussions of making a public statement were dropped, according to several officials.

State Department spokesman James P. Rubin confirmed that the State Department received "credible information this summer that Mr. Kikhia was murdered by the Libyan government. We informed the family of what we knew." But he denied that there had been any "policy reasons for not discussing the case publicly. The problem was the nature of the information that was developed."

Juggling a Balkan Exit Strategy

EDITORIAL

THE TERM "exit strategy" has come into vogue in discussions of American Bosnia policy. It is impossible to imagine the great military enterprises of our past being weighted down with such an anxious declaration. No one is clear exactly what it means, but many are confident the United States doesn't have one.

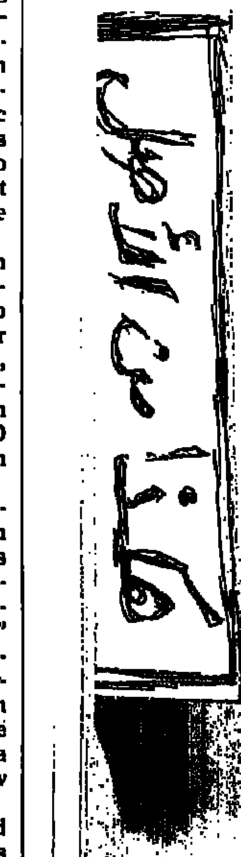
Actually, it's no big secret. An exit strategy is the opposite of a quagmire: from fear of out-of-control involvement to an assertion of certain disengagement. An exit strategy is the answer to the needs, even prayers, of a president caught between the tugs of politics and foreign policy. For some of President Clinton's Bosnia critics, it is enough to set a deadline, say, next June, when the current peacekeeping force comes to the end of its mandate, and simply to call that deadline an exit strategy. That might ease some of the president's political problems, but whether it serves the national interest is something else again.

It is said, and fairly, that the president brought much of this trouble upon himself by not being clearer about either his Bosnia objectives or the tactics he was pursuing to achieve them. But the Clinton administration is trying to rectify that error these days in order to clear a little political space for staying on in Bosnia after next June — not an exit strategy but a staying-on strategy. Officials have been enunciating not only humanitarian requirements but strategic ones: to keep the United States engaged in Europe and to provide leadership for NATO at a delicate time of alliance enlargement.

Otherwise, the administration argues, the "mixed" and incomplete peace gains made so far in Bosnia will be lost, the war there may resume and widen, and a whole new Balkan inflammation may ensue, with consequential damage to NATO and the American position in Europe.

The administration is absolutely right. Pulling out on an arbitrary date when the gains are incomplete and still reversible is a recipe for unraveling. Such an "exit strategy" would condone "ethnic cleansing," invite others to revise borders by force, end the Dayton accord's faint but valuable promise of restoring someday a workable Bosnia and trigger new warfare there.

Staying on with the NATO-led allies (including Russia) has its costs — fortunately, these have not included casualties among the peacekeepers. But staying on also has its benefits for Bosnia and the United States. It may take, says the administration, "a good while to come." And for a good end.



GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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OAS Charter Shuns Coup-Based States

Thomas W. Lippman

THE ORGANIZATION of American States amended its charter last week to permit the nations of the Western Hemisphere to ostracize from the group any government that comes to power in a coup.

While it may have little practical effect, the amendment was hailed by U.S. and other hemisphere diplomats as an important symbol of the political transformation that has swept Central and South America in recent years.

In country after country, from Guatemala to Chile, military regimes and autocratic governments have been replaced by democratic rule, a phenomenon that last week's event was designed to establish as an enduring principle.

"There is a revolution in the Americas. We have achieved political democracy," said Venezuelan foreign minister Miguel Angel Burelli Rivas at a ceremony at the organization's headquarters in Washington. "Now we must make certain it reaches the minds and souls of our people."

Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott said the event was "a historic occasion" that enshrines "a serious commitment to the ideals of democracy, freedom and human rights" in the Americas.

At the ceremony, Venezuela delivered the "instruments of ratification" that put into effect an OAS charter amendment approved by the general assembly nearly five years ago. With ratification by Venezuela — the first country President Clinton is to visit on his trip to South America this month — two thirds of the OAS members have formally endorsed the amendment, putting it into effect.

It provides that any OAS member country "whose democratically constituted government has been overthrown by force" may be suspended from the organization and all its committees and working groups. In the past, the OAS — like its counterpart organizations in Africa and Southeast Asia — generally refrained from sitting in judgment on the internal politics of member countries.

The most significant exception since the organization's creation in 1948 has been Cuba, suspended since 1962 following Fidel Castro's communist revolution. In this decade, however, the OAS has adopted procedures permitting collective condemnation of coups or undemocratic seizures of power, such as the military takeover in Haiti and the 1992 "self coup" by Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori.

Now the principle of collective condemnation is enshrined in the organization's charter. Suspension of an illegitimate government would not be automatic, however; it would require a two-thirds vote by the 35 OAS members.

Of the countries that have not yet ratified the charter amendment, the most significant is Mexico, which has explicitly rejected it. The Mexican government took the position that "the preservation and strengthening of democracy in our region cannot be enhanced through isolation, suspension or exclusion. . . Mexico is opposed to the punitive character ascribed to the OAS" by the amendment.

Technology 'Can Cut Pollution'

Martha M. Hamilton

THE United States could reduce emissions of greenhouse gases through technology and avoid huge costs to the economy and wrenching changes in the American lifestyle, according to a U.S. Energy Department study released last week.

The Energy Department's contribution to the rancorous debate over global warming comes shortly before an international meeting on climate change in Kyoto, Japan. At that meeting in December, the United States and other developed nations will be pressed to agree to binding commitments to reduce energy consumption sharply, and within 13 years to roll back, to 1990 levels, emissions that have been blamed for global warming.

The Energy Department's study found that the costs of research and development of technology to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide to 1990 levels by the year 2010 could be paid for — in part or in full — by energy savings.

The White House will host a conference on climate change next week as it struggles to decide what position it will take in the highly divisive international debate. Attempts to shape the official U.S. position are being played out in a battle of advertising and with competing studies that warn of risks to the environment if emissions are not curbed, and risks to the U.S. economy if the government yields to international demands.

The cost of developing energy-saving technologies is "likely to be more than balanced by savings in energy bills," the study said. "This analysis shows that what's good for the environment also can be good for the economy," said Energy Secretary Federico Pena.

The Energy Department study carries significant weight because it was developed over the course of a year by five highly regarded federal laboratories and was reviewed by outside professionals. The department cautioned that the report shouldn't be read as a description of what the Clinton administration will propose, but department officials noted that it backs up an assertion that Clinton made in August — that the United States could reduce emissions at no cost by 20 percent "if we just changed the way we do things."

Millions Needed After Italy Quake

Vera Haller in Rome

ART EXPERTS said it would cost tens of millions of dollars to restore the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi after it was heavily damaged by two earthquakes that struck central Italy last week.

"It will never be the same," said Antonio Paolucci, a former culture minister leading a task force to oversee work on the basilica, whose renowned frescoes by the Italian master Giotto and other important Renaissance painters were damaged when a large part of the ceiling collapsed. Four people were killed by falling debris in the church.

Pope John Paul II said he was saddened by damage to the 13th-century basilica, built to honor St. Francis, founder of the Franciscan order. It is an important monument for the Roman Catholic Church that is visited each year by thousands of pilgrims and tourists.

Speaking at a gathering of Italian Catholics in Bologna, the pope also offered his condolences to the victims of the earthquakes, which devastated much of the central regions of Umbria and the Marches. Ten people were killed, dozens injured and about 12,000 people were left homeless.





Assisi's archbishop celebrates an open-air mass last weekend for quake victims PHOTO: DOMENICO STINELLIS

Workers began clearing rubble from the hundreds of collapsed buildings in the earthquake-hit area and engineers inspected houses still standing to make sure they were safe. "There is a general fear among the population to return to their homes," said Franco Barberi, the government's undersecretary of civil protection.

In Assisi, firefighters removed debris from the basilica, carefully preserving pieces of mosaics and frescoes and stacking them in the square outside. Offers to help restore the basilica poured in, with the Louvre in Paris and the British Museum in London volunteering their experts. Officials said a bank account would be opened this week to accept donations from the public for restoration work.

Paolucci, who gave the initial cost estimate of tens of millions of dollars, said structural repairs to the basilica would have to be done before restoration work on the frescoes could begin. He said he hoped the work would be completed by 2000.

Double Standards on Ethics Exports

OPINION

Ellen Goodman

IMAGINE if it were happening here. Imagine if our government were sponsoring research in the poorest pockets of the United States where masses of pregnant women are infected with HIV.

The researchers know that AZT could save many of their babies from being born infected. Without AZT one in four babies is infected by her mother, with it only one in 10.

But AZT is expensive, $1,000 a mother as it is prescribed now, and the need for a cheaper regimen is critical. So with the best of motives, they set up a study to see if lower, less costly doses are as good as higher doses. Some mothers are given the current AZT protocol, some are given smaller doses. But half are given placebos, those doses of nothing pills. After all, they reason, how else can they find out if something is better than nothing?

Imagine now what happens when the placebo children are born, when it is discovered that in the name of science the researchers withheld a known treatment. When it becomes known how the government justified this research saying that these few babies were sacrificed today for the good of more babies tomorrow. And that their mothers would never have had any medical care anyway.

It is, of course, unimaginable. Yet it is happening in Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and other countries where AIDS has spread like, well, AIDS. And happening with the best of American intentions and funding.

In some African countries up to 40 percent of pregnant women are infected. On average the annual health care budget in Africa hovers around $11 a person a year. The likelihood that these women will get AZT is virtually nil.

So the urgency of the problem and the poverty of the people are used to explain research that would simply never pass ethical muster here. In the heated controversy that has arisen over their use of placebos, the question has come up: Does a double medical standard justify a double ethical standard?

Here, giving a placebo when a known effective treatment exists violates all the canons for research on human subjects. But in the seven AZT studies funded by our government abroad, the women being given dummy pills will give birth to more than a thousand infected babies.

Sidney Wolfe and Peter Lurie of the Public Citizen's Health Research Group, who helped raise the furor, insist the studies not only violate our guidelines for conducting research in developing countries, they violate guidelines that say "ethical standards should be no less exacting" in poor countries than in our own.

Marcia Angell, executive editor of the New England Journal of Medicine, compared these studies on African mothers to the infamous Tuskegee studies on African-American men. In Alabama, researchers silently charted the course of syphilis in their subjects long after a cure for the disease was discovered.

But many respected AIDS researchers heatedly disagree, arguing that in the real world of African AIDS, where women have little prenatal care and nothing is the norm, these placebo studies offer the best, fastest hope. They argue that African leaders know best the ethical balance for their own countries. If AZT is too expensive for Africa, do we deal with a low economic standard by lowering an ethical standard? If so, developing countries could become convenient offshore research factories for ethically cheap science.

Just a few months ago, our government publicly apologized for Tuskegee. Now I wonder, did we shut down Tuskegee? Or did we export it?

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
October 5 1997

Charities Get Caught Up As Tools of War

John Pomfret in Goma

REBEL forces loyal to Laurent Kabila were plotting their attack on the key southern city of Lubumbashi earlier this year when a glitch surfaced in their battle plan: Kabila's army needed fuel to airlift troops to the town, recalled a Rwandan officer who participated in the operation.

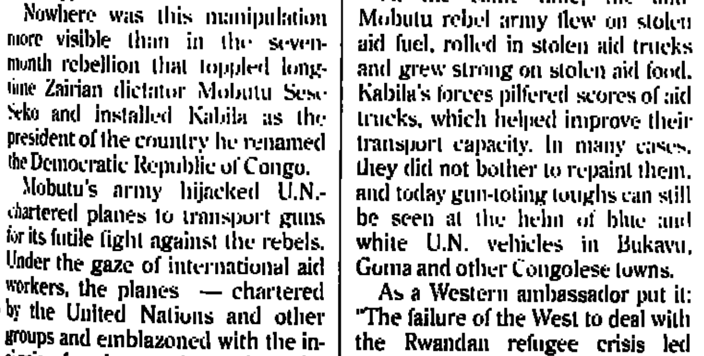
They found it at a depot maintained by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees in Goma, a Congolese town in central Africa's Great Lakes region that had already fallen to Kabila's men. More than 15,000 gallons of fuel were seized to ferry 300 crack troops southward. Within days of the airlift, Lubumbashi was in rebel hands.

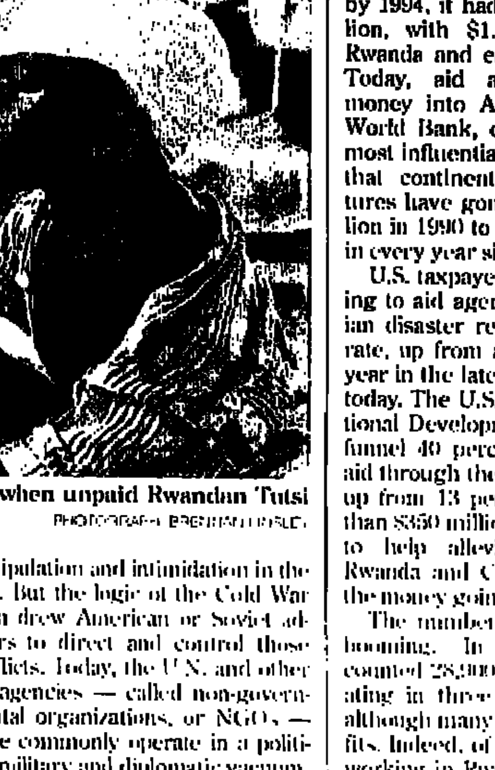
The fuel theft was just one of a series of episodes that illustrate the central, if unintentional, role the U.N. refugee agency and other aid agencies have been playing in regional crises in the aftermath of the Cold War. War lords, rebel leaders and imploding governments from Bosnia to Brazzaville now manipulate aid agencies as never before — using their food to feed troops, their fuel to power airplanes and their logistical infrastructure to conquer or occupy vast territories.

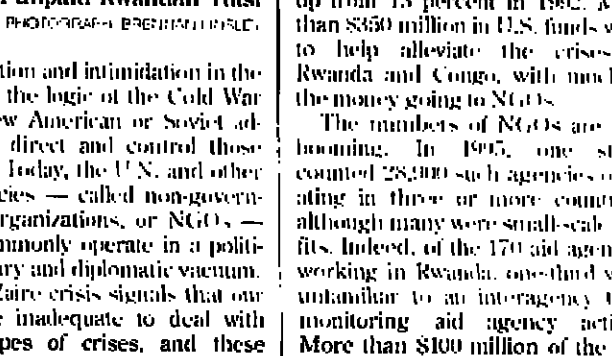
Nowhere was this manipulation more visible than in the seven-month rebellion that toppled longtime Zairian dictator Mobutu Sese Seko and installed Kabila as the president of the country he renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Mobutu's army hijacked U.N.-chartered planes to transport guns for its futile fight against the rebels. Under the gaze of international aid workers, the planes — chartered by the United Nations and other groups and emblazoned with the insignia of such agencies as Save the Children and UNICEF — flew into U.N.-run refugee camps packed with weapons. The arms were distributed to Rwandan Hutu refugees — former soldiers and militiamen involved in Rwanda's 1994 ethnic massacres — who had become Mobutu's first line of defense.

"It made us all pretty sick to see those planes fly in with all those guns," said Mike Deppner, a Canadian physician who worked with the UNHCR. "It was our camp, but we were powerless to do anything."







A Congolese man sits in hospital with his son, who was shot in the head when unpaid Rwandan Tutsi soldiers rampaged in the village of Masisi, near Goma, last month PHOTOGRAPH: BRENNAN LINSLEY

At the same time, the anti-Mobutu rebel army flew on stolen aid fuel, rolled in stolen aid trucks and grew strong on stolen aid food. Kabila's forces pilfered scores of aid trucks, which helped improve their transport capacity. In many cases, they did not bother to repaint them, and today gun-toting toughs can still be seen at the helm of blue and white U.N. vehicles in Bukavu, Goma and other Congolese towns.

As a Western ambassador put it: "The failure of the West to deal with the Rwandan refugee crisis led directly to the fall of Mobutu."

In Congo and several other post-Cold War regional crises, humanitarian action has become a substitute for Western military and diplomatic intervention. Yet the aid agencies lack the tools or the clout to handle the explosive situations they find themselves confronting. As such, the aid they bring often becomes a resource in a conflict, helping to fan its flames rather than damp them down.

The Western reaction of deploying food and money — but not troops or diplomatic pressure — has, military scholars argue, become an important component in the tactics of these local warriors. It has also given aid workers cause to question two once sacred tenets of their trade: that every disaster deserves a humanitarian response and that aid agencies must remain strictly neutral. Last month, Sadako Ogata, the U.N. high commissioner for refugees, announced that her agency was suspending its operations in Congo — a decision that highlighted the United Nations' frustration with its aid missions.

"We are being forced to pick sides in crises now," said a senior official at the International Committee for the Red Cross, whose founding principles — that all sides of a conflict be treated equally — have been shaken in recent years, most notably by the killing of eight Red Cross workers in Chechnya late last year. Indeed, most aid agencies in Bosnia are working openly for unification of the country, in opposition to the separatist Serbs.

Aid agencies have been subject to manipulation and intimidation in the past. But the logic of the Cold War often drew American or Soviet advisers to direct and control those conflicts. Today, the U.N. and other aid agencies — called non-governmental organizations, or NGOs — more commonly operate in a political, military and diplomatic vacuum.

"The Zaire crisis signals that our tools are inadequate to deal with these types of crises, and these types of crises will be more likely in the future," said Lionel Rosenblatt, head of Refugees International, a Washington-based humanitarian advocacy group. "I unfortunately don't see much hope for improvement . . . Whole regions will go up in smoke with the international community unable and unwilling to make any type of decisive action."

Rosenblatt said he believes that given the unwillingness of Western powers to get involved in conflicts that do not directly affect their interests, "the only pieces that will be free to move on the chessboard will be the aid agency pieces. That means they will be at the front line of political, security and humanitarian crises for years to come. They will be the substitute for political force, a Band-Aid. But the Band-Aid will only last a certain amount of time before the situation explodes again."

An indication of the extent to which the U.N. refugee agency — known by its initials, UNHCR — and other aid groups have begun to usurp the traditional role of governments is in their budgets. In 1971, the total expenditure by disaster relief agencies totaled $200 million; by 1994, it had ballooned to $8 billion, with $1.4 billion spent for Rwanda and eastern Congo alone. Today, aid agencies put more money into Africa than does the World Bank, once considered the most influential body involved with that continent. UNHCR expenditures have gone up from $544 million in 1990 to more than $1 billion in every year since 1992.

U.S. taxpayer money also is flowing to aid agencies and humanitarian disaster relief at an increasing rate, up from about $300 million a year in the late 1980s to $1.3 billion today. The U.S. Agency for International Development has pledged to funnel 40 percent of all American aid through these agencies by 2000, up from 13 percent in 1992. More than $350 million in U.S. funds went to help alleviate the crises in Rwanda and Congo, with much of the money going to NGOs.

The numbers of NGOs are also booming. In 1995, one study counted 28,900 such agencies operating in three or more countries, although many were small-scale outfits. Indeed, of the 170 aid agencies working in Rwanda, one-third were unfamiliar to an interagency team monitoring aid agency activity. More than $100 million of the $1.1 billion spent in Rwanda and eastern Congo in 1994 could not be accounted for, a U.S. government official said.

Another, grimmer sign of how the role of aid agencies has changed is the rising death toll of aid workers. During the Cold War, relief workers operated on the sidelines of conflicts, protected by an invisible shield of neutrality. Now, while no firm statistics are available, it seems clear that several hundred of them are being killed each year. Combatants have come to view aid workers as participants in their wars, and their food, fuel and transport are seen as weapons.

Agencies 'Helped Spark Congo Conflict'

IN THE case of Congo, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the U.N. refugee agency (UNHCR) not only loomed large in the conflict, but arguably helped spark it, *writes John Pomfret in Goma.*

Laurent Kabila's successful bid to topple Mobutu Sese Seko was aided in large part by Rwanda's Tutsi-dominated government, which — as many of its leaders and officers have acknowledged — sought to use Kabila's rebels to eliminate a pressing problem on Rwanda's western border.

In 1994, the Hutu-extremist government ruling Rwanda tried to eradicate that country's Tutsi minority. After soldiers, militiamen and ordinary citizens had killed more than a 500,000 Tutsis and Hutu moderates, a Tutsi rebel force halted the slaughter, toppled the Hutu government and sent hundreds of thousands of Hutus fleeing across Rwanda's borders. About 1.1 million — including perpetrators of the slaughter — poured into Congo, where refugee camps were quickly built and supported by the UNHCR and other aid agencies.

Within weeks, the U.N. agencies and NGOs had allowed Rwanda's ousted Hutu government to reconstitute itself in eastern Congo, using the refugee camps as a political base. In some cases, U.N. officials and other aid workers actually encouraged Hutu radicals to take control of the camps, reasoning that it was easier to rely on a government-in-exile to distribute aid and keep order, U.N. officials acknowledged.

"That effectively is our policy," a senior U.N. field worker said in Goma. "We always work through governments. Mobutu's government was nowhere to be found. It was natural to turn to the Hutus."

"All of us were overwhelmed," recalled Terry Sawatski, head of the Africa aid program for the Mennonite Central Committee, a charity based in an Akron, Pennsylvania. "Nobody knew what to do with a million people." Sawatski and others said that relying on and assisting the gunmen and politicians, instead of trying to separate them from the rest of the refugees, was a terrible mistake.

Starting in 1994, Sadako Ogata, the U.N. high commissioner for refugees, issued pleas for international military help to separate the killers from the innocents. At one point, her agency even considered hiring private security firms to do the work. But, Ogata said in an interview, the idea was shelved because it was too costly. Ultimately, the U.N. refugee agency hired Mobutu's Presidential Guard to provide security for the camps — a decision that had further unintended consequences once the rebellion broke out. Mobutu used the guard members to lead Hutu refugees on counterattacks against Kabila's rebels.

Mobutu's guard refused to disarm the Hutus; thus many of the refugee camps became armed camps, organized to support the radical Hutu leaders in their desire to reconquer Rwanda or at least destabilize it. Military training was commonplace. Weapons purchases were public. Hutus who expressed the wish to return to Rwanda peacefully were harassed and sometimes killed.

In the end, the aid agencies were never able to disarm the Hutu militias that controlled the camps, nor could they stop the Hutu gunmen from sneaking back into Rwanda to stage revenge attacks against Rwanda's new, Tutsi-dominated government. Paul Kagame, Rwanda's vice president and defense minister, said he planned what became Kabila's rebellion as a means of keeping the camps from destabilizing his fledgling government.

Kagame ordered the rebellion to begin in October because, he said, Rwandan intelligence had learned that the Hutus were planning a major offensive against his country. The rebellion spread quickly as Mobutu's army crumbled, but the swift success of Kabila's troops also posed logistical headaches for them. Aid agencies provided unwitting assistance (see above).

After the camps were smashed by the rebellion, U.N. and Western aid agencies continued to play an unintended role in the war, luring Hutu refugees out of hiding in the jungle with the promise of succor. Many of the refugees — not only gunmen, but women and children as well — were subsequently slaughtered by Kabila's men, Western aid officials and Zairian witnesses have said.

Pother in the Palace

Martin Walker

THE ROYALS
By Kitty Kelley
Warner. 547pp. $27.

THE British Monarchy has endured for more than 11 centuries, give or take a regicide, a brief Cromwellian Republic, a Restoration, two Revolutions, two crown-shifting foreign invasions, repeated civil wars and an often meandering bloodline. It will take more than the sudden death of a divorced princess and a deliciously readable almanac of all available gossip by Kitty Kelley to unseat an institution so resiliently durable.

There are only three ways to rid Britain of its royals. The first would be a disastrous war culminating in hostile invasion of the kind that ended the Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian empires after the conflict of 1914-18. The second would be bloody insurrection with the tumbrils rolling down the Mall, and the swish of the guillotine or the rope looping over the lamppost to write the last bloody chapter to a sanguinary dynastic history. The third would be by Act of Parliament, a democratic procedure that contains its own catch: that the royal assent is required before any such act becomes law.

Speculation, therefore, of the monarchy's imminent demise would appear shakily founded. And despite the exhausting catalogue of the faults of the recent and current crops of Windsors, Kitty Kelley seems finally to have been persuaded that there is life in the old mob yet.

"The weight of history favors survival of an institution that continues to reinvigorate itself. Even as Britain reassesses its monarchy, the monarchy retains its genius for adaptability and compromise, almost defying destruction," runs her thoughtful final chapter. "They have survived because their subjects had a need to believe in them. That yearning to look up to someone or something grand, even grandiose, still exists. Although the godlike luster has eroded and the institution has been diminished, even disgraced, the need for enchantment endures and the hope for renewal remains."

That sobering final judgment comes at the end of 500 occasionally steamy pages that savage and genuinely illuminate the careers of the flawed humans who have occupied and circled the throne this century. Never before have all the stories about all the bit players, from Prince Philip to Princess Margaret, from the Queen Mother to the grimly devoted old courtiers, been collected in a single, useful place. Most of them ring true, even if some are widely reckoned by knowledgeable subjects to be false.

Kelley appears to have believed almost every tale she was told, sufficiently at least to drop them into her book as speculation or as gossip. This cavalier approach to veracity means that the book has deliberately not been published in Britain, where it would doubtless run afoul of the combination of stringent libel laws and a court system that bears the significant title of the Queen's Bench. Still, the media and the Internet are between them ensuring that most of the juicy stuff is now commonplace in the saloon bar of every Queen's Head in her lands.

We learn of the cross-dressing fetishism that enlivened the brief and stormy marriage of Princess Margaret and Lord Snowdon, and of the Queen's dreadful education, which once had her asking whether someone called Dante was a horse or a jockey. We are informed that King George VI was an alcoholic, and that Margaret and her royal sister were each born as the result of artificial insemination, since their father "had a slight problem with his willy." If true, Kelley has missed the chance of a piquant historical irony. "Willy" became British slang for a penis in dubious honor of Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany, Queen Victoria's grandson.

But then Kelley's grasp on British history seems a touch uncertain. Determined to ram home her theory that the House of Windsor is an alien German imposition on the British people, she suggests that King George V was the first of the line "who could speak English without a German accent." That was not true of George III, George IV, King William, Queen Victoria, nor of her son King Edward VII. After such an error, the claim that King George V's doctor ended the reign with a cocaine-morphine cocktail "so that his death could be reported in the morning Times rather than in the less prestigious afternoon newspapers" requires rather more evidence than the casual lists of named interviewees and books that make up the footnotes.

This uncertain sourcing is of less importance in the second half of the book, whose account of the wretched marriage of Charles and Diana adds nothing to the public record of newspapers, authorized biographies and eavesdropped telephone conversations. But Kelley has given an entirely credible account of a miserable boyhood that helps explain why Charles was such a rotten husband to Diana.

The Queen rightly emerges from the Kitty Kelley treatment as the source of most of her own misfortunes. But her woes have been deepened by her own early determination to welcome and to use the media to reinforce a royal mystique that had hitherto flourished in discretion. She overruled her archbishops and her prime minister (Winston Churchill) to bring the BBC TV cameras to her coronation. She summoned them again in the 1960s and thereafter to film carefully choreographed days in the royal life, and established a series of precedents that an ever less reverent media were quick to exploit. It was said of earlier monarchs that those who lived by the word were liable to perish the same way. The media bring fewer glories, and impose — at least on the Queen herself — a lesser penalty: Her subjects' greater familiarity with her inevitably leads to less affection.

THE real question is whether the current unpopularity of the Queen and her son and heir, cruelly exposed in the outpouring of grief at Diana's funeral, seriously matters. In the past 180 years the British throne has gone through at least three dangerous crises. Each time, the Crown was saved by its prime minister. Lord Melbourne reinvented the young Victoria as a fairytale princess. Disraeli transformed the secretive widowhood of Victoria into the elderly grandeur of the Empress of India. Stanley Baldwin helped the throne to weather the 1936 abdication crisis by ditching a wayward king for his more dutiful brother.

The fate of the current monarch now rests with the highly popular and modernizing prime minister Tony Blair, who seems likely to reform and tame it along the lines of what are known as the bicycle monarchies of Scandinavia. As with Bill Clinton facing the dilemma that race relations pose in America, Tony Blair's strategy for the monarchy is to mend it, not end it. Kitty Kelley may have done him and Britain's antiquated and quasi-feudal system a favor by explaining in such approachably demotic terms why the monarchy needs to change but also why it may still be politically useful to a people so deeply imprinted by its presence.

Narcissistic Genius of the Keyboard

Ted Libbey

GLENN GOULD: The Gould Variations
The Ecstasy and Tragedy of Genius
Peter F. Ostwald
Norton, 368pp, $29.95.

PICTURE a musical artist so extraordinarily gifted, and so different from any who had gone before him, that in a performing career lasting less than a decade he could come to be regarded as a legend. Picture one so fascinating — his interests as well as his foibles — so troubled, self-absorbed, self-destructive and, above all, so oddly cryptic in his dealings with the rest of the world that in the decade-and-a-half since his death he could inspire more people to write about him than any other musician of his generation save one: Elvis Presley. Picture all of that and you begin to see why Glenn Gould, the Canadian pianist who retired from concertizing in 1964, at the age of 31, and died a recluse in 1982, lives on like Elvis in the hearts and minds of many music lovers.

The latest book to come our way on the subject, Glenn Gould: The Ecstasy and Tragedy of Genius, is also, sadly, the last book that will ever come from the pen of Peter Ostwald, who died in 1996 shortly after completing it. Ostwald was a thoroughly competent violinist according to a colleague of mine who actually played with him, but his vocation was medicine, specifically psychiatry.

Born in Berlin, trained in New York, he later became the founder and director of the Health Program for Performing Artists at the University of California. As a musically literate member of the medical profession, of which there are many, Ostwald had a particular interest in the intersection of — I hesitate to say connection between — neurosis and creativity or artistic accomplishment. Prior to writing this psychobiography of Gould, he had produced an important study of Robert Schumann, entitled Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius, as well as a biographical portrait of Vaslav Nijinsky.

The new book marks a major advance in our understanding of one of the 20th century's most significant performing artists. Its underlying thesis is that what made Gould a great pianist — an exceptionally strong mother-son bond formed at the piano and expressed through music — was also what made him a psychic cripple for his entire life, incapable of dealing with emotion outside the realm of music, unable to form close personal relationships, obsessively concerned with symptoms of disease, and constantly in need of controlling his immediate physical environment.

As such, what was clearly meant to be a volume celebrating the pianist's genius contains a serious and ultimately saddening critique of Gould's personality. One of Gould's worst features was his habit of discarding friends and acquaintances. Ostwald belonged to that group, but there is not a shred of vindictiveness here. What seems to have bothered Ostwald most — not surprisingly, in view of his professional bias — was Gould's refusal to seek psychiatric counseling at any time in his life, although on several occasions reported by Ostwald he was subtly encouraged to do so.

Ostwald's account of Gould's life introduces many new elements to the picture. It incorporates firsthand reminiscences from family, friends and colleagues, as well as documentary information not previously unearthed. It also offers a number of telling insights into Gould's psychological makeup that help us understand the artist as well as the man.

The opening chapters, in which Ostwald recalls his first meeting with Gould, and the closing one, a gripping account of Gould's final week of life, are particularly fine. In them, Ostwald is as engrossing a writer as any who has tried his hand at biography. About their meeting Ostwald writes that Gould "obviously loved to talk and to hear himself talk — a brilliant monologue about orchestras he had played with, conductors he liked, his favorite composers, all delivered in densely constructed sentences with numerous imbedded clauses. Words flowed out of him with unabashed vitality, making it difficult to interrupt. Not that one would want to stop a musician who possessed such a razor-sharp intellect and spun out words as delectably as he played music."

But much in the middle of the book — devoted to Gould's childhood and adolescence, his astonishingly brief career as a concert artist and the years after his "retirement" when he was involved in radio work for the Canadian Broadcasting Company — is not so good. Ostwald's voice disappears into a procession of unedited or barely edited transcripts of interviews and conversations, which tend to sound alike after a while. The narrative becomes choppy, and our sense of being in personal contact with the subject is lost. Admittedly, Ostwald is being more honest than most biographers. Since he did not know Gould during much of this time — indeed, nobody really knew Gould at any time — he can be forgiven for stepping back and writing less personally, more clinically.

In the end, the Glenn Gould who will be known, the only one who can be known, is the pianist of the recordings made between 1955 and 1980. His is the presence behind those remarkable accounts of the Brahms intermezzi, which Gould himself described as "sexy" and which I find almost unbearably depressing. He is the thinker behind those anti-heroic readings of the Beethoven sonatas, the spirit within some of the most illuminating and controversial Bach ever played. Ever the narcissist, Gould found his perfect companion in the piano — it said only what he wanted it to say and never spoke back. Ultimately, as Ostwald undoubtedly knew, it is the same piano that will be Gould's most sympathetic biographer.

World Bank warning of poverty time bomb

Larry Elliott in Hong Kong

THE World Bank president, James Wolfensohn, put the fight against global inequality at the top of the development agenda last week with a stark warning to prosperous nations that they ignore the gap between rich and poor at their peril.

Pledging that the Bank had learned from its past mistakes, Mr Wolfensohn said: "The time has come to get back to the dream: the dream of inclusive development."

The president used his keynote speech at the annual meeting of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to drive home to the West that without more equality there would be neither peace nor global stability. "What we are seeing in the world today is the tragedy of exclusion. Whether you broach it from the social or the economic or the moral perspective, this is a challenge we cannot afford to ignore."

Mr Wolfensohn added that the objective was to reduce glaring disparities both within and between countries, thereby bringing more people into the mainstream. "This — the challenge of inclusion — is the key development challenge of our time."

Michel Camdessus, managing director of the IMF, also stressed the need for "solidarity" and the "responsibility of industrial countries to help minimise the social and cultural costs of integration into the global economy".

Although the Fund's structural programme for Thailand is certain to cause economic hardship, Mr Camdessus said that the IMF was "now raising the issues of income distribution in its ongoing dialogue with member countries and emphasising the need for greater equality of opportunity".

Mr Wolfensohn, who has been battling to reform the Bank's internal structure while at the same time promoting debt relief for the poorest countries, said the privileged of the developing and developed world could close their eyes to what was happening.

"But we must recognise that we are living with a time bomb and unless we take action now, it could explode in our children's faces.

"If we do not act, in 30 years the inequities will be greater. With population growing at 80 million a year, instead of 3 billion living on under $2 a day, it could be as high as 5 billion. In 30 years, the quality of our environment will be worse. Instead of 4 per cent of tropical forests lost since Rio, it could be 24 per cent."

Outlining a programme for partnership development, Mr Wolfensohn said the governments and peoples of developing countries should be "in the driver's seat" so they could set their own objectives.

It was also important for aid to be selective. "There is no escaping the hard fact: more people will be lifted out of poverty if we concentrate our assistance on countries with good policies than if we allocate it irrespective of the policies pursued."

He added: "The message for countries is clear: educate your people, ensure their health, give them voice and justice, financial systems that work, and they will respond and they will save and they will attract the investment, both foreign and domestic, that is needed to raise their living standards and fuel development."

Aid organisations, which in the past have been highly critical of the Bank's record, gave the speech a mixed response. Andrew Simms, of Christian Aid, said: "There is a hell of a long way to go both on debt relief and on moving the World Bank into a position where it can achieve pro-poor economic programmes in the poorest countries."

But Oxfam's Ian Bray said: "We are extremely positive about Mr Wolfensohn's message. He set an agenda which is clearly focused on poverty reduction. That's what the Bank is going to be about."

China joins scramble for black gold

The stakes are high in the global power struggle to control the Caspian Sea's oil wealth. **James Meek** reports from Almaty

CHINA has put a dramatic opening stake on the table in its bid to buy into the 21st century version of the "Great Game" — the intensifying struggle for control of the vast oil wealth of the Caspian Sea region — by sidelining United States multinationals and pledging to invest $10 billion in the oilfields of Kazakhstan.

The deal signed last week in the Kazakh capital, Almaty, by the Chinese premier, Li Peng, and the Kazakh president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, is Beijing's answer to years of squabbling between Russia, its former satellites and Western multinationals over how to export Caspian oil to the West: take it East instead.

The agreement to build a pipeline from Kazakhstan to China and to restore two huge oilfields is larger than the $7.8 billion "contract of the century" put together by a Western consortium of 10 companies to tap the offshore reserves of the other Caspian oil giant, Azerbaijan. Mr Nazarbayev gleefully said after the signing: "This is truly a contract of the century."

The Kazakh-Chinese deal broadens the gigantic arena across which the contest for profits and influence in the Caspian is spreading. Vast sums of money have been spent; it has drawn in some of the world's most powerful companies, from BP to Mobil; it has brought the last superpower eyeball to eyeball with some of its proudest rivals — Russia, Iran and now China — and it has attracted cold war warriors from Margaret Thatcher to Henry Kissinger as lobbyists and high-fee delegation garnish.

As peacemakers, cornucopias or instruments of blackmail, hypothetical export pipeline routes thread through the dreams of warlords, presidents and diplomats in Eurasia's most intractable wars, from Nagorno-Karabakh to Afghanistan...

The Caspian is the new Middle East and, the players hope, one free of the cold war rivalries that fuelled regional conflicts.

But as with the original Great Game — the 19th century skulduggery by rival British and Russian agents in northwest India and Central Asia — there is a sense that the governments involved are being hustled along into big strategic commitments by the pace of entrepreneurial activity on the ground.

"There's no question that the Caspian Basin is of strategic importance to the US, to the West and to Japan in terms of energy," said one Western diplomat in Almaty. "It's the clear alternative to the Middle East as a source of oil."

One example of what this might mean took place in the Kazakh desert last month, when 500 US paratroopers parachuted in for a peacekeeping exercise after a 19-hour flight from Fort Bragg, North Carolina — the longest flight to an airborne landing ever carried out by the US military. "The message I would leave is that there is no nation on the face of the Earth that we cannot get to," said General John Sheehan, the first to jump.

Russian paratroopers also took part in the exercise, but there were only 40 of them.

A few days after the exercise had finished, the Kazakh foreign minister, Kasymzhomart Tokayev, showed Russia just how fast the pace of history has become by warning Moscow, in a territorial row over oil rights in the Caspian Sea, that Almaty was interested "in maintaining the US presence in Central Asia" — a presence that is not yet six years old after 150 years of Russian domination.

The latest Chinese deal has also shown Washington that it and the oil giants are not the only players in town, and that Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are able to play investors off against each other.

Two big US companies, Unocal and Amoco, were after the same two large oilfields as their rival, the China National Petroleum Company, but despite lobbying from Washington they could not match the non-commercial terms offered by the Chinese, who agreed to fund the pipeline.

The foreign oil community is phlegmatic about the deal with China, and the general feeling in Almaty is that the Caspian oil states need to take every chance they can to export their products.

ALTHOUGH deals are now in place with Russia, the old master of the region, to export oil to Black Sea ports from both Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, there is suspicion that a desire for control over its former satellites still lingers in the Kremlin.

At the same time, the quickest route of all — and the one oil exporters would love to use if only the US state department would allow it — is south through Iran.

"The only reason we haven't been able to put the pipeline in the right place is because people don't want to go through Iran," said one seasoned observer of the Caspian oil scene in Almaty. "Mind you, do you want all the oil in the world flowing through one region?"

Despite the export problems, the potential rewards are so enormous that no one can afford to walk away. This week, thousands of oil industry executives descended on Almaty for the fifth annual Kazakhstan International Oil and Gas exhibition, which has become a key date in the energy barons' diaries.

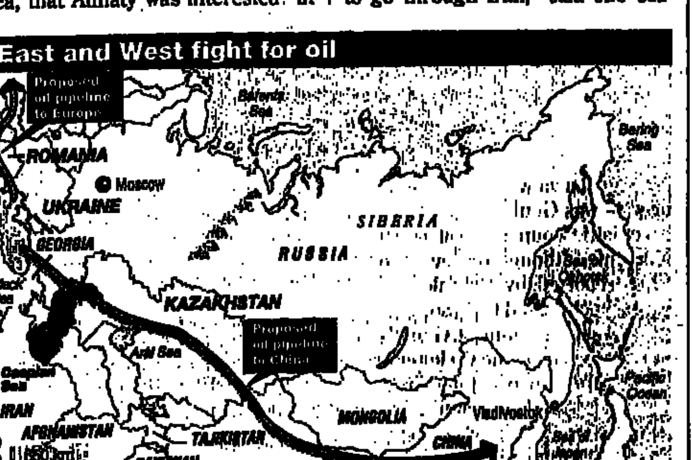
The scale of the bonanza was never really in doubt. The upper estimate for total oil reserves under and around the Caspian is 200 billion barrels — enough to fuel the US economy alone for 30 years — and Kazakhstan could become the fourth or fifth largest oil-producing country in the next century.

New cross-cultural extremes prevail in the petrochemical capitals, as Aberdeen solicitors offer desirable residences in Azerbaijan, while expatriate prospectors wash down *fajitas* with Corona beer at the foot of the snow-capped Tien Shan mountains, the border between China and Kazakhstan where Almaty lies.

In 1985, before Chevron became the main partner in Kazakhstan's Tengiz oilfield — the biggest discovered in the past 20 years — a well blew out. It spurted oil for 444 days, shedding up to 2 million barrels, before it could be brought under control, a sign both of the richness of the region's reserves as well as the terrifying possibilities for pollution.

While the West and China are seeking reliable sources of energy for their growing economies, the Caspian oil states and their neighbours have more modest aims — to claw themselves up to prosperity after the Soviet years and their chaotic aftermath. Georgia under Eduard Shevardnadze has high hopes from yet another pipeline being built through his country; there is even a fantastic project to build one through Afghanistan.

"Our republic's future, and ensuring a dignified life for its people, depend in the long run on the Great Game in which Kazakhstan is taking part," said Mr Tokayev, the foreign minister. "The stakes in the game are huge."



In Brief

INTEL, the world's biggest computer chip maker, is facing its second major inquiry by US competition authorities. The Federal Trade Commission has launched a broad investigation of the company, which has an 85 per cent share of the global market in microprocessors.

SHARES clocked up their biggest one-day rise for 10 years and the pound slumped as London's City was thrown into turmoil by a report in the Financial Times — officially denied — that the Government was considering joining the European single currency "at an early opportunity".

BRITAIN'S trade gap with the rest of the world narrowed in July as exporters brushed off the strength of sterling to sell record levels of goods. The deficit on trade in goods in July was $728 million, following June's $1.5 billion trade gap, according to figures released by the Office for National Statistics.

TRAVELERS Group, the financial services company, unveiled a $9 billion deal to buy Salomon Inc, Wall Street's pre-eminent trading firm.

PRINCE Alwaleed Bin Talal Abdulaziz Alsaud, the wealthy Saudi prince who invested $115 million in Apple Computer, has come to the rescue of the ailing fashion house, Donna Karan International, with a $20 million investment. The firm lost $13.8 million in the first six months of this year.

MORE than three-quarters of a billion dollars were wiped off the value of the publishing giant Reed Elsevier, as the Anglo-Dutch group disclosed it faced a potentially massive compensation bill for overstating the circulation figures for some of its most important publications.

BILL GATES, the chairman of Microsoft, has pushed the Sultan of Brunei off his perch as the world's richest man. Forbes magazine estimates Mr Gates's personal wealth at a whisker short of $40 billion.

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates September 29	Sterling rates September 22
Australia	2.2469-2.2499	2.2252-2.2282
Austria	19.99-20.01	20.21-20.23
Belgium	58.62-58.72	59.27-59.37
Canada	2.2372-2.2394	2.2241-2.2263
Denmark	10.82-10.83	10.93-10.94
France	9.54-9.55	9.65-9.66
Germany	2.8419-2.8445	2.8723-2.8757
Hong Kong	12.50-12.51	12.40-12.41
Ireland	1.1042-1.1064	1.0972-1.0994
Italy	2,781-2,784	2,803-2,806
Japan	195.42-195.67	195.66-195.87
Netherlands	3.2005-3.2039	3.2346-3.2374
New Zealand	2.5341-2.5377	2.5215-2.5258
Norway	11.45-11.46	11.66-11.67
Portugal	289.47-289.81	291.95-292.62
Spain	240.12-240.31	242.39-242.59
Sweden	12.21-12.23	12.30-12.32
Switzerland	2.3458-2.3487	2.3560-2.3588
USA	1.6160-1.6170	1.6024-1.6034
ECU	1.4502-1.4520	1.4634-1.4651

FTSE100 Share Index up [illegible]. FTSE 250 Index up [illegible]. Gold up [illegible].

NEW DELHI

Project Manager

Water and Sanitation Office

The DFID has set up a Water and Sanitation Office (WSO) in Delhi to assist the Government of India with its water and sanitation projects. At present, there are projects in Lucknow, rural Maharashtra, rural Orissa and West Bengal. Some of these are nearly finished and a priority will be to build up a pipeline of new projects. These will include exploring innovative approaches, through NGOs, to delivering water and sanitation services to remote populations; assisting State Governments to develop water management plans; supporting the decentralisation of service provision in order to improve efficiency and local accountability; and working to facilitate public-private partnerships.

Working under the supervision of the Development Co-operation Office, New Delhi (DCOD), your role will be to direct the activities of the WSO and, in particular, to help build up a pipeline of new project work. This will involve developing DFID knowledge of sector policies and assisting the DCOD in identifying, formulating and assessing new projects and extensions to existing projects. In addition, you'll provide strategic guidance to the WSO which results in a more cost-effective approach to the sector as a whole, as well as assisting the DCOD in the continuing development of a water sector strategy for the India Programme.

QUALIFICATIONS

You should have a background in engineering, social science, environmental or urban planning, coupled with excellent communication, facilitation and staff management skills. Experience of water and sanitation projects is also highly desirable, as is the ability to demonstrate a strong understanding of issues related to sectoral reform. Personal qualities of drive, determination and enthusiasm are also a prerequisite, and work experience in India will be an advantage, as will knowledge of DFID procedures and practices.

TERMS OF APPOINTMENT

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Closing date for receipt of completed applications is 25 October 1997.

For further details and application form, please write to Appointments Officer, Ref No AH304/ES/GW, Abercrombie House, Eaglesham Road, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 8EA, stating Ref No AH304/ES clearly on your envelope, or telephone 01355 843545.

DFID is committed to a policy of equal opportunities and applications for this post are sought from both men and women.

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For further information write to the **Personnel Team, Christian Aid, PO Box 100, London SE1 7RT, phone on 0171-523 2255 (answerphone) or E-mail kelliot@christian-aid.org. Applications should be addressed to the Chair of the Board and should be received by October 31, 1997.**

Christian Aid supports the world's poorest communities in their struggle for life and justice in over 60 countries. It is the official development agency of 40 Churches, representing most denominations in the UK and Ireland. It works through 300,000 volunteers, 280 staff and 750 organisations at home and overseas.

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Letter from Japan Eric Stewart

Chariots of the divine wind

KONDO-SAN paced nervously and wrote some calculations on his palm. I seized the chance to proffer my suggestion, after seven failed attempts to lift-off.

"Kondo, can we lower the wing angle to three degrees? It's still stalling when you get about 50 metres down the runway," I said. He hesitated, then replied, "OK". I was afraid I might have taken advantage of the Japanese difficulty in refusing requests outright.

But on the next attempt the Eagle 1 finally flew, albeit *à la* Spruce Goose: a short hop of about 15 metres, reaching an altitude of one metre (somehow the word "altitude" didn't seem applicable here). The crew screamed in desperation at the pilot: "Go! Harder! Don't quit!" — Kanazawa Institute of Technology's Eagle 1 is human-powered.

The human-powered aircraft (HPA) most Westerners recall is Paul MacCready's Gossamer Albatross, which crossed the English Channel in 1979. But HPAs are alive and well in Japan, thanks to the annual Bird-Man contest held in Lake Biwa, north of Kyoto. About 20 university teams converge on Biwa with aircraft whose price-per-kilogram ratios rival an F-16 fighter. Fortunately Japanese education is well-funded.

These ethereal craft are rolled up the ramp that projects from the shore to a platform runway 10m above the water. After spending thousands of man-hours in design and construction, they will all crash-land (crash-water?) in the lake, most having flown but a few minutes, if that. I once asked Kondo why they didn't attempt to fly all the way across the lake and avoid crash-landing. He just laughed. It never occurred to me to ask why the teams chose to fly their craft straight into the middle of Japan's largest lake in the first place. Japan tends to erode one's sense of conventional logic.

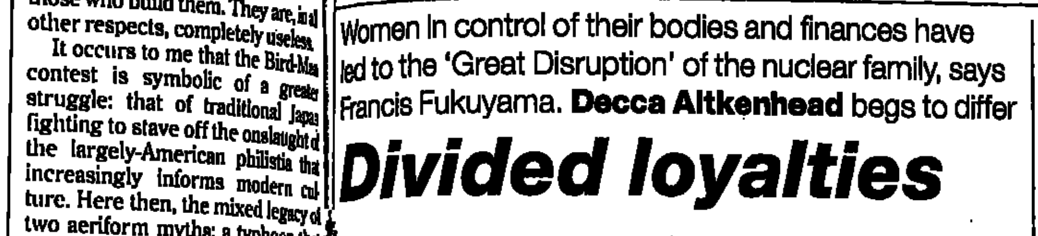
I had been invited to join the project in March. They had decided to build a new plane this year, having deemed their four-year-old Eagle 1 as being *minikui* (hard to look at). I went to a few meetings, but at any one time half the kids were talking computers and the other half were trying to figure out the chords to the latest chart-topper. This was not my idea of high-powered engineering, and I quit going. But in July I got a call from Kondo, the project leader: the contest was two weeks away — could I help build the new plane? It was "not quite finished ..."

"Not quite started" would have been more accurate. However, a massive transformation had occurred during my absence: the guitar was gone, replaced by balsa dust and Styrofoam (computers were still ubiquitous). Students worked frantically in every corner of the shop. This was more to my liking. I was immediately put to work.

It requires a certain degree of self-deception to construct, with great care and passion, an exquisitely-beautiful aircraft that, barring aerodynamic thaumaturgy, shall end up in the drink. But to build a beautiful thing, and to build it well, is the *raison d'être* of artists and engineers. If ever the line between art and craft were blurred, it is in these beautiful birds that soar but once for no purpose than to elevate the souls of those who build them. They are, in all other respects, completely useless.

It occurs to me that the Bird-Man contest is symbolic of a greater struggle: that of traditional Japan fighting to stave off the onslaught of the largely-American philistia that increasingly informs modern culture. Here then, the mixed legacy of two aeriform myths: a typhoon that scattered an invading fleet of Mongols in the 13th century was called a *kamikaze*, or a "divine wind". Icarus found no such tutelary in Aeolus, and fell to the sea. While the profusion of Nikes and McDonald's tempts me to believe Japan may be following Icarus's plunge, I yet wonder if it is not the unbridled devotion, now connoted by *kamikaze*, that leads these bright students to thumb their noses at his plight, which may ultimately be theirs, too.

Sadly, this year's contest was cancelled after only a few flights. Biwa was in the path of a typhoon. It seems that that divine wind may have been the result of another — El Niño.



Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

WHY does the reception of weak television signals improve while it's raining?

WHEN it rains, the conductivity of the atmosphere increases, so it is easier for signals to reach your receiver. On the other hand, this can also worsen the signal, since interference from other signals may occur. — *Alexander Chatzigeorgiou, Thessaloniki, Greece*

HOW did the colour red come to be associated with danger and the colour green with no danger?

THE colour of blood in every living creature is not red (August 31). Lobsters and their relations have blue blood owing to the presence of copper in the porphyrin molecule, rather than iron (haemoglobin), as in mammals; snails have green blood. — *Nigel Chaffey, London*

GREEN is commonly associated with danger — the attributes of colours are variable and even contradictory. Green in cooked food is a sign of corruption, but green plants and green thread are both used for healing. Fairies were often supposed to wear green and the bad luck of wearing green is a widespread belief. Stationary green lights on waterways are indicators of dangerous conditions, although green road-traffic lights indicate the reverse. There are no absolute rules. — *Derek Froome, Altrincham, Cheshire*

CAN pyramid selling schemes ever work?

WESTERN capitalism is the world's most long-lived and beneficent pyramid scheme. It depends for its existence on ever-increasing production to supply ever-expanding markets.

It remains to be seen if capitalism will exhaust its resources so much as to threaten its participants' survival. — *Thomas J Cantwell, Bristol, Virginia*

WHY is the "hash key" on a telephone so called?

THE key was added by Bell Laboratories in the early 1960s as tone dialling was being introduced. The intention was that they would only be used for computer communications. The name "octothorpe", referred to by Jane Teather (September 14), was dreamt up on the spur of the moment by a Bell Labs employee, Don MacPherson. The "Octo" derived from the eight points on the symbol. The "thorpe" came from Don's involvement in a campaign to get athlete Jim Thorpe's Olympic medals returned from Sweden.

The name confusion is made worse by the fact that the hash key (often called "pound" in the US) was often replaced on British computer keyboards by the pound-sterling symbol. Thus, both in the UK and US someone could press Shift-3 and come up with a symbol that they would refer to as a pound sign but each would be seeing a different symbol. — *Kevin Ashley, London*

THE hash key, when called an octothorp (without an "e"), is the cartographic symbol for a village, representing eight fields around a central square. This is also the source of its name, octothorp meaning eight fields. — *John Rankin, Wellington, New Zealand*

IN JAPAN, the key is called the "sharp" key after the musical notation. Exciting stuff, no? — *Colin Jones, Tokyo*

Any answers?

HOW long will water keep in the fridge before it is unfit to drink? — *John Turner, Mosman Park, Australia*

AN OBITUARY of Mother Teresa said that she had been made an honorary United States citizen and that she was only the fifth such in history. Who were the other four? — *Jennifer Merton, Hoddesdon, Herts*

IF dinosaurs had developed complex civilisations, could any evidence of this possibly have survived the 65 million years they've been extinct? — *William Hamlin, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. The Notes & Queries website is at http://nq.guardian.co.uk/

Liquid asset? Bottled water costs 700 times more than tap water PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN GODWIN

Bottled water is 'vast con'

Paul Brown

BOTTLED water is one of the "great cons of the 20th century", with customers paying 700 times more in the supermarket than for the same quality from the tap, according to the British Water Companies Association (WCA).

Attacking the bottled water industry for being "vastly over-priced", Pamela Taylor, the WCA chief executive, says there is little to differentiate it from tap water.

Its marketing is based on associations with sport, health and fitness which have no basis in truth, and its packaging and distribution are environmentally damaging, she says.

The difference in price between bottled water and tap water is comparable with the gap in cost between running a Ford Escort and a light aircraft. If household water supplies were charged at the same rate as bottled water, the average household bill in Britain would rise to £77,000 a year.

One of the reasons consumers believe bottled water tastes better is because they store it in the fridge. If tap water were bottled and kept in the fridge it would be impossible to tell the difference, the WCA says.

Tap water is more tightly controlled than bottled water. The Drinking Water Inspectorate reported last year that 99.7 per cent of all samples passed purity tests. Almost 2 per cent of bottled water failed the same tests, meaning that 10 million litres of bottled water with unacceptable levels of bacteria are sold in British supermarkets each year.

The association also criticises the labelling of bottled water. "Table" and "purified water" could be, and often are, simply bottled tap water. "Spring" and "natural water" often have to undergo similar treatment to tap water before they can be bottled.

One of the most telling arguments against bottled water is the harm the trade causes to the environment.

Mike Walker, the association's head of policy, says: "While the bottled water industry is keen to market its product by using natural beauty and unspoilt countryside, bottled water is far more environmentally-damaging than tap water. Many of the UK's major brands use plastic bottles. Most of these end their lives in landfill sites."

The transport of water from places as far away as Israel, Japan, South Korea, and water-short countries such as India and Kenya is condemned as unnecessary and wasteful.

Robert Hayward, the director general of the British Soft Drinks Association, says bottled water is a booming business. "The growth is the result of consumer choice. Consumers buy our products because of their taste, their consistency of quality and their convenience."

Splashing out

- **Tap water in Britain costs 0.07p a litre; bottled water costs 50p a litre on average, roughly 700 times more.**
- **Perrier is the most expensive brand, at £1 a litre; the cheapest is Sainsbury's own brand, at 17.5p a litre. Some "table water" is merely bottled tap water.**
- **For the average daily human requirement of 2.5 litres, one person would spend £28.70 over a lifetime on tap water; bottled water would cost £20,500.**
- **In blind trials, panels of experts could not tell the difference between bottled and tap water.**
- **Bottled water is six times more likely than tap water to contain excess bacteria.**
- **Some 800 million litres of bottled water are sold in Britain each year, and a new brand appears every 10 days.**
- **The UK imports bottled water from as far away as India and Kenya, which are both short of clean water. The British charity, Water Aid, is trying to provide supplies in these countries.**
- **Bottled water is bad for the environment. Each year, about 600,000 tonnes of plastic water bottles have to be disposed of in landfills. Thousands of lorries are used to transport bottled water around Europe alone, using an average of 400 litres of diesel for each journey.**

Women in control of their bodies and finances have led to the 'Great Disruption' of the nuclear family, says Francis Fukuyama. **Decca Aitkenhead** begs to differ

Divided loyalties

THEY used to say you could learn more about a political position by finding out who proposed it, than by getting to grips with its actual arguments. In these brave New Labour days, however, when such notions are apparently passé and anyone can come out with anything, the political map is more muddled.

Francis Fukuyama has just published The End Of Order, an account of why the nuclear family is in freefall, and what should be done about it. It's a dense book, with a weakness for much socio-economic jargon and inscrutable diagrams, but this certainly won't prevent it entering the great popular debate which The Family has become. The author of the best-selling The End Of History, Fukuyama is the sort of academic who delights fashionable nineties supper parties.

At first glance, it looks a rather promising offering — a rightwinger suggesting that the family might not be working simply because men aren't much use to women these days. On closer examination, it is not quite so straightforward.

Fukuyama's starting point is this: we are living through an age of the Great Disruption. This period, which began in 1965, is distinguished by a shattering of social norms, the principal cause being the collapse of the nuclear family. This collapse has in turn caused poverty, child abuse, crime, etc, etc. In order to do something about it, we must first decide who to blame.

Nothing very new so far, then. What is surprising, from a man published by the Social Market Foundation (an organisation whose patrons include Margaret Thatcher), is the next bit of his argument. The two traditional rightwing explanations for the problem — the welfare state and feminism — are, he says, comprehensively flawed.

If the welfare state is to blame, Fukuyama points out, how come so many studies of illegitimacy and divorce rates have failed to prove that they always go up when state benefit levels for single mothers increase? Equally, he rejects as absurd the idea that cultural shifts in attitude since the sixties could have destroyed the centuries-old institution of the family in less than a generation. It is "hard to believe that people throughout the developed world simply decided to change their attitudes towards such elemental issues as marriage, divorce, child-rearing, authority and community, so as to completely alter the nature of the family in the space of two or three decades".

It is splendid, if a little surprising, to hear the flaws in those old Thatcherite arguments exposed by a man Thatcher would have considered one of hers. And the argument he offers instead is superficially attractive. The real reasons for family decline, Fukuyama writes, are the availability of the Pill and abortion, and women's entry into the labour market. Suddenly, women can control their own bodies and finances and provide for their children single-handedly if they choose; by contrast, men are losing their status, their sense of social obligation, and their usefulness. Men no longer feel responsible for the women they have sex with; nor do they feel responsible for the children they father, because the mothers can support them by themselves. In other words, the old social obligations which bound men to marriage have been removed.

"While it may have been the movement of women into the paid labour force that lies at the heart of the Great Disruption, the real behavioural problems have all been on the side of men. To talk neutrally about family breakdown ignores the fact that men and women are not equally complicit in creating the social problem. Women, even working women with high-powered careers, still tend to invest more of their time in child-rearing than men. The real problem is men, who feel today that they have been released from the obligation to stay with their wives and particularly with the children they father. There is no deficit of mothers and motherhood; there is, however, a serious deficit of fathers and fatherhood." Is this a feminist argument? It sounds like one. It is when you examine what Fukuyama regards as the solution to this state of affairs, that his analysis begins to look rather different.

The casualties of the Great Disruption are ostensibly children in this book; it is their dysfunctional family life which is in turn fracturing society, and it is their welfare Fukuyama purports to be worrying about. However, he thinks this is best achieved by helping men.

Fukuyama has noticed that, in Japan, women have managed to enter the labour market without wreaking social havoc. This, he thinks, is because Japanese labour laws actually allow wage discrimination in favour of men, divorce laws are also biased towards men, and a good deal of female employment is temporary, or curtailed as soon as a woman marries.

"If Western countries were to re-introduce discriminatory labour laws that kept women out of labour markets and did not permit them to earn comparable wages to men, then the resulting dependence of women on male incomes would probably help to restore traditional two-parent families." This is written with not a shred of irony. When he adds: "Needless to say, this is not a real policy option for anyone," his regret is almost palpable. And his choice of phrase, when he goes on to say "it is hard to see how Japan is going to be able to avoid greater wage equality", is that of a man who clearly thinks this is rather a shame.

The real problem with Fukuyama's argument is one typical of much ostensibly progressive thinking on the family; it is the assumption that men just can't help their inadequacies, and so society must intervene to create incentives for women not to mind. Sure enough, Fukuyama calls on the old biology argument to back him up; men, he declares, are genetically predisposed not to stay faithful or to look after their offspring.

"In other words," he writes, "if left free to maximise their interests as rational agents, it is not at all clear that they will be induced to make those one-way sacrifices necessary for the rearing and education of their children." So men, the poor dears, just can't help themselves, and it was really very foolish of women to go and get a job, thus giving men an excuse to act on their basest instincts. Nowhere is there the suggestion that women have any natural urge for independence; men's behaviour, by contrast, is gene-given, and therefore something society must try to deal with, but not something men are to be held responsible for.

So Fukuyama's solution is this: we should re-divert public money away from social security benefits for mothers, and give it to men.

"It is not clear to me," he writes, "that whatever little money will be spent on job training and job creation as mothers move from welfare to work, would not be better spent on providing incentives to the fathers and make them employable." In other words, it is not men but women who should pay the price for men's social and economic failings, and help society find a way of recreating men's financial power and superiority over them. Only then, when mothers are once again forced through economic necessity to stand by their man, will the world be fine again.

It seems you can still tell a lot about an argument from the politics of the person proposing it.

The End of Order is published by the Social Market Foundation, 11 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3QB, price £9.50

Superwoman's coming home – to the family

The resignation of Brenda Barnes from Pepsi-Cola reflects a dilemma faced by both men and women, writes **Sally Weale**

THE ink on her resignation letter had barely dried before the carping began. Yet another leading businesswoman was leaving her job to concentrate on being a mother. The death knell of the superwoman was sounded. The chaps were back in with a chance.

This time it was Brenda Barnes, one of America's most powerful women executives, who announced last month she was standing down from her $2 million-a-year job as president and chief executive of Pepsi-Cola's North American operation to spend more time with her husband and three sons.

The interminable "Can Women Have it All?" debate reared its head again. Perhaps, one British tabloid suggested with gleeful haste, the era of superwomen like Nicola Horlick was over. "And the chaps can get a look in once again."



Barnes: quitting her post to spend time with her family

Ms Barnes, aged 43, chose her words carefully. "I hope people can look at my decision not as 'women can't do it' but as, 'for 22 years Brenda gave her all and did a lot of great things'," she told the Wall Street Journal.

"I have struggled with this for a long time. I don't think there's any man who doesn't have the same struggle. Hopefully, one day, corporate America can tackle this," she said.

Undoubtedly, such high-profile resignations highlight the dilemmas all parents — particularly women — face in combining work and children. But, as Anna Coote, deputy director of Britain's Institute for Public Policy Research, points out, Brenda Barnes and the other so-called superwomen are far from typical.

"These are very, very exceptional women. They are the ones who can afford to say, 'I fancy a bit of time with the children'. Most people can't afford that. What most women are doing is carrying on juggling.

"We all compromise. We all do the best we can. Employers should do more to make work a family-friendly place, for women and for men.

"The [British] government is very interested in promoting family-friendly employment, not just because one or two highly senior women drop out, but because the day-to-day experience of working parents is that it's very hard to juggle."

So why is it that whenever a woman in a senior post leaves her job it causes such a stir? Is it because it somehow proves that women can't have it all?

In 1994, the departure of Penny Hughes from her post as president of Coca-Cola UK to have a baby at the age of 35 was greeted with similar gloating.

The same happened a year later when a stressed-out Linda Kelsey quit as editor of She magazine. Her story had particular piquancy thanks to She's reputation as "the magazine for women who juggle their lives".

At the same time, Nicola Horlick, whose book, Can You Have It All? is published in Britain this week, is perceived as some sort of monster for answering the question her book title poses with a "yes".

Few would want to step into her shoes, with five children and a high-pressure career, but no man in her position would ever come in for the same sort of flak.

Maeve Haran, aged 47, gave up her job as a TV executive soon after the birth of her second child eight years ago. Her subsequent novel, Having It All, which examined the dilemma of balancing work and family, infuriated feminists when it was published six years ago.

Today she detects a change of climate. "When I gave up my job, the first question that occurred to me was: 'Am I letting women down?' Nowadays there is more sympathy for somebody doing something like this. There's a recognition by women that they all want the same things; they want more control and more flexibility. Men do, too.

"I admire somebody like Barnes who has given up so much. Except it's sad that she's had to make this all-or-nothing decision," Ms Haran says.

Now she combines bringing up three children with a writing career. So does she have it all? "I certainly have more of it."

Jiang's gamble downs a Flying Pigeon

Market forces have had a devastating effect on China's state industries. Beijing sees privatisation as the answer, but risks alienating what remains of the workforce. **Andrew Higgins** reports from Tianjin

AT THE Flying Pigeon bicycle works, in a brick cavern stinking of urine, a heap of rusting metal tethers the soaring rhetoric of the Chinese Communist Party.

Produced for a bicycle that no longer sells, the chunky frames have been dumped next to an idle workshop — dumped like thousands of workers "downsized" by market forces that the World Bank once predicted would propel China's economy ahead of the United States by 2020 but have pushed much of the country's state-owned industry into decay.

At the back of the factory spread dormitories built to house the élite of China's proletariat and the backbone of the party's urban power. Trees shade courtyards designed for after-work leisure but now clogged all day with laid-off labourers.

A chubby man who used to make Flying Pigeons packs up a cart loaded with nylon hair ribbons, his main source of income now that he has *xiagang* or "stepped down from his post", the party's euphemism for the unemployment that, according to secret official calculations, afflicts 25-30 per cent of urban workers. "We have to beg for food," he says.

Such complaints provide the foundation of what is probably the party's riskiest reform since it began disbanding collective farms 20 years ago. So bleak is the outlook for most of China's 118,000 state-owned industrial concerns — 70 per cent of which lose money in the middle of a dazzling economic boom led by China's non-state sector — that doing nothing is even more perilous.

The party's 15th congress, a jamboree of leaden speeches and rituals of obedience, stirred only yawns and grunts of contempt among those worried about feeding their families. But a programme of disguised privatisation at the centre of the Beijing conclave that ended last month is rooted in the rot at plants like Flying Pigeon in Tianjin, a former treaty port that sees itself as the Shanghai of northern China.

Near the ribbon hawker lie bundles of plastic bags stuffed with toilet paper cut into small squares, the wares of another small cottage industry launched to cushion the collapse of a factory whose main product — based on a 1932 British Raleigh — was once so coveted it could be bought only with coupons.

The crippled daughter of a retired 40-year veteran of Flying Pigeon peddles the paper on the street along with rough ingots of New Happy Masses soap. The family makes a profit of a few cents on each transaction — still enough to double a monthly allowance of 200 yuan ($40) promised, but only sporadically paid, to each laid-off worker.

So widespread is the crisis that Tianjin has coined its own slang to describe the fate of state-owned factories: they are *huang le* — turned yellow like falling leaves.

But, in an odd way, the decay is a measure of China's economic success. In the past, state factories thrived only because they faced no competition. When Deng Xiaoping invited foreign capital into China, the first joint venture in Tianjin was a Danish-funded bicycle factory. It produced a light and brightly coloured alternative to the Flying Pigeon. Other rivals quickly followed. As China's living standards increased, the market for scooters and cars soared while demand for the Flying Pigeon, indelibly associated with Mao jackets and Maoism, slumped.

China's state firms have degenerated into fiefdoms that enrich officials and feed popular resentments.

Across the road from the factory, a dance hall with tinted glass doors beckons. China's new rich pay $6 for a bottle of beer and $40 for conversation with young hostesses. The manager says more than half his customers pay for their fun with public money, mostly cheques drawn on the accounts of state concerns.

Anger over such conspicuous corruption, which fuelled the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 and has increased since, worries the party even more than the economic rot caused by state ownership. "They stuff their pockets with enough money . . . for three generations," scoffs the tailor.

Last month's congress in Beijing is dismissed as a lavish freebie. A former textile worker says: "They eat breakfast on the state, ride the state's bus, smoke the state's cigarettes and then eat lunch on the state. This is our communism."

The government's plan to turn state firms into joint-stock companies will bring new redundancies and risks a frenzy of asset-stripping. But so many workers have already lost jobs, and so much state money has been filched that the leadership is ready for a dangerous gamble.

It calculates that more unemployment at a time when the non-state economy is still booming will be less dangerous in the long term than letting the crisis drag on until state plants seize up and the entire financial system collapses because of bad debts.

Unclear, however, is how these debts can be cleared without selling off the dormitories and other facilities that provide some security to even *xiagang* workers.

"It will cause temporary difficulties to part of the workers," President Jiang Zemin told 2,000 congress delegates. "But, fundamentally speaking, it is conducive to economic development, thus conforming to the long-term interest of the working class."

Old remedies have clearly failed.

"Seize the East Wind of Management Efficiency Year to make Flying Pigeon Soar Again," reads a faded banner at the Flying Pigeon works. Kiosks that once stocked discounted goods to keep the workers happy are shuttered. Perhaps the surest signs of decay are the glass cases for party propaganda that line the entrance. They are empty. It is a bold admission: telling workers how happy they are no longer works.

John Sweeney in St George's, Grenada, reports on how Washington's squalid deals are ruining a paradise

Rotten bananas

THE THUNDERHEADS stack up high above the extinct volcanoes of Grenada, threatening rain, as the switchback road climbs, then doubles back and climbs again to the banana plantation.

The place names on the way are a record of victors' history: St George's, St Eloi Point, Moliniere Point, Dragon Bay, Flamingo Bay, Grand Roy Bay, Gouyave Bay, Brothers Estate, Florida, Morne Jaloux.

Grenada was Spanish, then French, then British — and briefly part of the American empire, when in 1983 President Ronald Reagan sent in marines to combat a "Marxist" state. There is no trace in the place names of the thousands of Caribs who were the real owners of Grenada, butchered by the French and smudged out of history by 1705.

Victors' history is scarring Grenada again. High up on the knife-edge ridges in the centre of the island, you can see the results: mile after mile of banana plantations, the fruit, unpicked, rotting on the trees.

This time the victors are the iron logic of the market, a mysterious United States billionaire, President Bill Clinton's re-election fund and the soothsayers of globalisation, including Sir Leon Brittan, vice-president of the European Commission. The losers are the banana farmers of the four Windward Islands — Dominica, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines — and Grenada.

Claudius Pierre strummed his machete with his stubby fingers as if it were a banjo. He owns a 29-acre plantation and faces ruin. He shook his head, took in the scenery of rotting fruit and said: "I am losing a great deal of money. Since January, Grenada hasn't exported a single banana. Our quality is too low, our labour costs too high and we can't compete. And now the World Trade Organisation has found against us. That means chaos. Two years ago, I employed 25 workers, now I have 11. There is no other crop. In the fifties, we exported a huge amount of bananas to Britain. Now nothing. And the future looks worse."

The WTO has found against European Union attempts to protect the banana exports of former British and French colonies from open competition. Before Grenada stopped exporting bananas, the prices it could command were pitiful — from about 15 cents a kilogram — whereas a fair profit would need around 85 cents.

"The bananas from Central America are cheaper. They use a lot of chemicals. They say some of the men have become sterile. Ours are organic," said Finbar Hopkin, a plantation worker.

The victors are the consumers in Europe and America. Inefficient producers have been forced out to make way for efficient farmers from Latin America. It's all down to market economics — or that's the official line. The reality is complex, but the smashing of the Caribbean banana farmers looks pretty ugly.

The word banana comes from the Arabic for "finger", and the finger points to political corruption at the very top of the Western world. But the victims are too poor and too insignificant for anyone who wields serious power to give a damn — bar one woman, Glenys Kinnock, a Euro MP.

The banana war is an unequal campaign. On the one side there is rhetoric, on the other big money. The rhetoric first: to help the poor economies of the Third World, the Lomé Convention of 1975 established a set of preferences, whereby EU countries, in particular Britain and France, would help African and



Once a major trader, Grenada has not exported a single banana since January

PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES NACHTWEY

Caribbean producers in order to serve the long-term noble goal of helping their broken economies.

The EU set up tariffs to help them compete with cheaper produce from elsewhere — particularly Mexico, Ecuador, Guatemala and Honduras.

The tariffs are not particularly effective. Two-thirds of Europe's bananas come from Latin America, while the sweet, smaller fruit from the Caribbean accounts for only 7 per cent. Nevertheless, this marginal restraint of trade angered US tycoon Carl Lindner, the banana king of Cincinnati. The discreet millionaire runs Chiquita Brands, one of the big fruit companies.

Each year hundreds of companies ask the federal government to intervene on their behalf, but only a tiny handful of cases are raised by the US trade representative, Micky Kantor. On April 11 last year, Kantor took up the complaint with the WTO, and Chiquita became one of the lucky few, which was unusual because it employs nearly all of its 45,000 workers in Honduras and Guatemala.

A simple check of funding records at the Federal Election Commissioner will show that Mr Lindner was a modest supporter of President Clinton, giving only $15,000 in the final 15 months of the Democratic National Committee. That kind of money does not cut the mustard.

But on April 12, 1996, the day after Mr Kantor asked the WTO to examine Chiquita's complaint, Mr Lindner and his officials began [illegible] away more than $500,000 to Democratic funds. The route of the money was interestingly discreet: not to central funds, where it is logged openly, but to state party funds, which is less open.

As a result of his largess, Mr Lindner enjoyed coffee with Mr Clinton and a night in the Lincoln Bedroom. None of this is lost on Claudius Pierre: "He paid money to Clinton and to Dole, so that whoever won he would have his friend in power."

The banana grower is absolutely right. The Cincinnati Post reported last March: "In the mid-1990s, the US Senate majority leader, Bob Dole, made repeated legislative attempts to help Chiquita in the banana battle — at the same time that he used planes owned by the Lindner family's corporate interests to make presidential campaign appearances around the country."

Finbar Hopkin was philosophical: "That's big politics for you. The big fish eat the small fish."

But the sweet symmetry of the banana wars has angered Ms Kinnock, who visited the Windward Islands recently: "There are sinister implications. Lindner channels $500,000 to the Democratic campaign. The pay-off has been a WTO ruling which could effectively threaten the entire social fabric of a region with a unique dependence on a single commodity."

She is not exaggerating. A few miles downhill from the plantation a plump, jolly woman was selling spices and Grenadan T-shirts for the tourist market. "All the hard-working farmers, the people who used to be prosperous, are now very poor," she said. "You can see who is making good money now: the youngsters into drugs. They make money by growing marijuana in the hills and trafficking in cocaine." — *The Observer*

It is a weather phenomenon that sends the world haywire. Last time it wreaked damage on a vast scale. Now it's coming again . . . and this time its effects could be worse than ever. **Tim Radford** reports

Ill wind that blows nobody any good

EL NIÑO is a bad news message half an ocean wide and several inches above sea level. It could be bringing warning of famine to come. Every two, or three, or five, or seven years, a vast stretch of the tropical Pacific gets warmer. An area of water the size of Europe, over in the western end of the ocean, begins to get warmer — in some places 5 or 6 degrees Celsius warmer. Warm water is less dense than cold so something strange happens: the whole area rises above sea level by several inches, a kind of shallow plateau above the rest of the ocean. Because air pressure and water temperature are linked, the winds that blow over El Niño begin to change. And then the huge ocean of heat — not the water, but the heat within it — starts to move across to the eastern Pacific, from the north of Papua New Guinea to the coast of Peru.

It happens in a distant corner of the globe, punctuated only by archipelagos of tiny islands, but the world soon knows about it. You can't alter weather in the Pacific on that scale without blowing a few ill winds around the rest of the world. When El Niño gets going, the going gets rough.

The fishermen off the Peruvian coast are the first to see the difference: the catch starts to fall. They have been observing this since at least 1576. They tend to notice this at Christmas so they call the phenomenon El Niño, the Christ-child. But the collapse of the anchovy harvest is only a start. There are droughts in southern Africa, and storms and floods in South and Central America. Hurricane patterns change in the Caribbean. The monsoon rains of southeast Asia are interrupted. There are droughts in some places, forest fires in another. This summer, the experts have made it clear: the ocean temperatures in the equatorial Pacific in July were higher than for 150 years, which is when data collection began. This could be the worst El Niño of the century.

At the other side of the globe, people are already counting the cost. There is a drought in Papua New Guinea. Gold and copper mining in the central highlands has come to a standstill because the rivers are too low to handle the barges that carry the bulk of the ores. Hydroelectric power supplies have been hit. The national coffee crop could be halved. A few thousand kilometres south, in the Australian capital, Canberra, economists are forecasting a bad year for agriculture: the national wheat crop could be down by 3 million tons.

When disasters arrive, they hurt the rich but they cripple the poor. Not just lives but livelihoods depend on the south Asian monsoons. In normal years, you can circle the date on the calendar and expect the heavens to open more or less on the due date. This year the rains were at least nine days late. The South African government has warned of a drought. In semi-arid regions, low rainfall means empty plates. Plants use water the way drivers use petrol, to get somewhere. It takes 900 litres of water to grow a kilogram of wheat; 2,000 to produce a kilo of soyabean, which is why the Mandela government is talking about "disaster management". On the other side of the Pacific, different things are happening. Peru declared a state of emergency in nine out of 24 of its regions. Floods in Chile in July were already the worst for a decade.

In 1982, El Niño was blamed for between $8 billion and $15 billion worth of disasters. The trade winds went into reverse. Peru had its worst rainfall in recorded history: Australia, Africa and Indonesia had droughts, dust storms and forest fires. There was a warm, wet spring on the east coast of the United States. Mosquitoes bred, and carried encephalitis into the human population. In Montana, the hot dry weather brought the mice down from the mountains, the rattlesnakes followed and cases of snakebite rose. There were shark attacks off the Oregon coast, and a rise in cases of bubonic plague in New Mexico. This time, things could get a lot worse.

Nobody knows why. That oceanographers can map El Niño, measure it and monitor it by satellite is a demonstration of how much we know. The fact that none of them can explain how an El Niño/Southern Oscillation, to give it its proper scientific name, is actually triggered, or why, is a demonstration of how little we know about the world.

IT REMAINS a climatologist's best argument for more intelligent spending on basic research. It is the meteorologist's best argument for more hardware and data in the places where nobody lives, because that's where the world weather systems brew up. It is the environmentalist's best demonstration that the world is an organism, or a machine, in which cause and effect chase each other around the surface of the planet.

The only thing you can't use El Niño for is to demonstrate that somebody is to blame. Some scientists describe it as a thermal flywheel, balancing ocean-atmosphere temperatures. Others say it may begin with a random change of wind, which sets up a pattern of events that feed on themselves, and gather momentum, ending with a pulse of heat that has to be distributed around the globe because that's what the laws of thermodynamics dictate. In Britain, people benefit from a stable system called the Gulf Stream, which carries tropical sunshine from the Bermuda islands and washes it round the British coasts, warming the onshore winds. Without this, the UK would be 5C colder than it is.

But El Niño is the original chicken-and-egg problem. Does it begin in the ocean? Or does it begin in the air? All anyone knows for sure is that by the time you see it, it has already begun, in the western equatorial Pacific, and then it always moves eastward. And every now and then, along comes a La Niña, when the ocean temperature gets a bit colder than usual, and the weather on two continents goes into reverse.

Dr David Webb, of the Southampton Oceanography Centre in Britain, has watched computer models that can play a game of El Niño quite easily. You tweak the winds, and you get one. You alter the ocean temperatures, and you get one.

"There is still quite a lot of argument in the scientific literature — discussion, I should say — about how these two things are linked and what actually triggers the mechanism," he says. "The suggestion now is that it is random fluctuations in the atmosphere or the ocean: it could be some extreme weather somewhere, it could be a volcano, it could be any number of things that trigger these, once the system is ready to go."

El Niño moves across the Pacific at a metre or two a second: 100km a day. The heat it transports interferes with the upwelling of cold waters off the Peruvian coasts. These cold waters come from the dark zone, rich in nutrients. Without phosphates and nitrates and iron, plankton cannot flourish. Without tiny creatures to eat, little fish perish. The anchovy harvest falls by 90 per cent. Across the ocean, far away in Zimbabwe, people have been keeping records of maize yields for 39 years. Every time there is an El Niño, the harvest takes a dive. Meanwhile off South America, the sea surface is warmer, there is more evaporation.

"There is a lot more cloud, a lot more water in the atmosphere, more rainfall, so you get floods," says Dr Webb. "At the same time, the convection that used to occur in southeast Asia — the typical afternoon storm — is a lot drier." It starts in the western Pacific because oceans have a tendency to become warmer on their western side.

Dr Mick Kelly, of the climate research unit at the University of East Anglia in Britain, has been watching the process for decades. He was one of the earliest to warn of global warming because of the dumping of man-made greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. But El Niño is not a man-made problem. "We are experiencing a batch of extremely unusual El Niños and La Niñas. We had the El Niño that wouldn't disappear during the first half of this decade and we now seem to be heading for certainly one of the most extreme events of this century. But it is a little too early to say."

He sees ugly problems ahead. "Even in a year of perfect climate worldwide we would still have difficulty feeding the world's population. Partly that is because the food is in the wrong place, rather than not enough food, but any change in climate is going to aggravate that position."

Some people, says Dr Kelly, see the El Niño as a natural temperature regulator for the globe. If it is, then global warming will make it swing more wildly, and its effects will become more extreme. "It could be like a pressure valve, acting as a regulator controlling the planet's temperature, so that it never gets too hot or too cold. Obviously if we are forcing the temperature up, then that regulator could go into overdrive."

But that is speculative. What the climate scientists have established is a pattern of ocean behaviour that has predictable effects. "We have to accept that in some of these areas, climate change on this scale from year to year, or from one batch of years to another, is a fact of life", says Dr Kelly. "The problem is that an awful lot of the planning for these areas has assumed a steady state climate . . . It is patently obvious that that is not the sensible way. You have to develop plans that can develop, can react to circumstances."

Every year, researchers think they can detect new ripples from the impact of El Niño in the unlikeliest places. When El Niño ends, cold waters upwell around the Pacific's coral reefs. These waters are rich in nutrients, and so creatures multiply. Among these are the sea urchins and the crown-of-thorns starfish which eat corals faster than they can multiply: even the atolls of the equatorial Pacific are at risk from El Niño's backswing.

In Israel, scientists combing through their own nation's rainfall data came up with a surprise. The winters with above average rainfall also coincided with El Niño years on the other side of the planet. The harshest years of drought in Israel coincided with a long run of years with no El Niño event. It is a reminder that the food on the dinner table anywhere on the planet depends on the play between sun and sea and wind somewhere else.

El Niño: The Christ child

The most serious El Niño - Spanish for the Christ-child - occurred in 1982-83, costing $13.6 billion in damage to crops and livelihoods

1. Trade winds: Normally push warm surface water away from South American coast towards Australia and Philippines

2. Western Pacific: Sea becomes several degrees warmer and a metre higher than on eastern side of ocean

3. Upwelling: Cold sub-surface water from Humboldt current replaces surface water. Nitrates and phosphates, nutrients in colder water, encourage growth of plankton – fish stocks thrive

4. El Niño: Trade winds drop every two to seven years. Warm water surges back across Southern Pacific halting upwelling of cold water, decimating regional fish population and threatening storms, droughts and high winds around the world

PACIFIC OCEAN

China
Drought affecting 20m hectares of arable land in north, grain harvest threatened by flooding in south

United States
Parts of northwest US have had rainfall 200% above normal for this time of year. Record snowfalls in Rocky Mountains

Philippines
Drought reducing rice harvest by 15%

Colombia
Fish catches down 20%

Indonesia
World's third leading coffee producer – crop down 25%

Africa
Damage to corn crops in sub-Saharan Africa

India, Sri Lanka, Thailand
Abnormally low rainfall during monsoon season threatening tea harvests in India and Sri Lanka, Thai sugar cane crop down 15%

Australia
Dryness in Australia's grainbelt threatens wheat production. Crops dying in parts of NSW. Fear of repeat of 1982 'Ash Wednesday' bush fire catastrophe

Peru
Floods in Peru and Chile. Warm currents 5°C above normal have forced anchovy and Pacific sardine to move offshore to colder waters – out of range of small Peruvian fishing boats

Warm · Wet · Dry and warm · Dry · Hurricanes · El Niño · Typhoons · Very dry · Humboldt current

© GRAPHIC NEWS Sources: Reuter, Times Encyclopaedia of the Sea, The Economist

Raking it all up again

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

"Thou can'st not say I did it."
— Macbeth

IN *The Nazis* (BBC2) Resi Kraus, everybody's granny, was sitting on a park bench in the sunshine when the gibbering past suddenly rose to reproach her.

Most of the Gestapo's files were destroyed but they survived in Wirzburg. It is a relaxed little town, not given to precipitate action. The Gestapo — methodical to a fault — started to burn their records alphabetically. They got as far as B, so the denunciations of Ilse Totzke survived. Among them was the statement of 20-year-old Resi Kraus, who testified that Ilse Totzke never responded to the greeting "Heil Hitler!" and often had a visitor of Jewish appearance. Ilse Totzke died in Ravensbruck.

A better liar would have denied it. A better woman would have admitted it. Resi dithered and did both. "This is rubbish. I can't understand this. I don't know . . . I cannot remember. The address is correct, my signature is correct but where it came from I don't know." At this point she was stung by the smile on her interviewer's face.

"You're grinning? All this incriminates me? Yes, but I was talking to a friend of mine and she said, 'My God, to think they rake it all up again after 50 years.' I mean, I didn't kill anybody . . . I didn't even join the Hitler Youth. My father said to me, 'I won't have you travel into town twice a week when it's dark'." So you remember that all right?

She glanced up. "It's starting to rain." And it was. The sun had gone in.

To be able to speak fluent Klingon or repeat the script of Fiend Without A Face verbatim indicates a deeply misspent youth. The misspent youths formed the panels of *Space Cadets* (Channel 4).

Space Cadets has been much funnier than strictly necessary. Craig Charles: "There are no black people in Logan's Run. Someone's planning on us not being here." Greg Proops: "There is also no good music in the movie either. You leave white people alone for thousands of years, you're gonna get a waltz."

***Chalk* (BBC1), the widely reviled situation comedy, returned late at night and nervously like something that expects to be shouted at. Either I am hardened to torture or Chalk is much better than it was. It now seems a pretty good farce.**

A starry-eyed student teacher (Richard Lumsden) joins the seething staff room like Christopher Robin going hippety-hippety-hop into a hell hole. ("What do you teach?" "Bastards!")

Patrick Campbell once invented a party game in which guests had to enter and say with the maximum poignancy "Mothah! I'm back!" There were lines in Chalk which yearned for the same vibrato. "I hope you can forgive me, mothah!" "Our love can never be!"



Sharp shooter . . . Robert Carlyle in Antonia Bird's Face

Cool and the gang

CINEMA
Richard Williams

ROBERT CARLYLE is the star of Antonia Bird's Face, which is a good enough reason to see it as soon as possible. After the success of Trainspotting and The Full Monty, Carlyle is hot in a way that most actors can only dream about. His performance as Ray, a London gangster with a troublesome conscience, will do nothing to lower the temperature.

Ten years ago, when he was in his early 20s, Ray stood on the barricades alongside his activist mother. But the failure of the miners' strike and the Wapping picket demolished his idealism, and "Red Ray" became a robber. We pick him up at 35, preparing his small gang for a ram-raid on the headquarters of a security firm. For him, and a couple of the others, it has the feel of one last job, a final payday. But, we think, as we survey this crew, that's probably what they always tell themselves.

In a brilliantly economical characterisation, Carlyle catches both aspects of the term from which the film takes its title. Most obviously, a "face" is the kind of character who inspires automatic respect in certain London pubs; but it was also once used to describe the members of the first generation of mods, youths who cherished a particular sense of style, one borrowed from the stars of fifties French and Italian art cinema. Sometimes, of course, these two species co-existed in a single person. Carlyle makes Ray their descendant, standing aloof in a good white Oxford button-down. It's a timeless cool, and he nails it with a precision that Pete Townshend would applaud.

The members of Ray's gang are a diverse crowd, giving the film a hint of those war movies in which a platoon acts as an exploded diagram of a wider society.

Dave (Ray Winstone), his co-leader, is slightly older, past his best. Stevie (Steven Williamson) is a backward boy from the Northeast. Julian (Philip Davis) is a trigger man, prone to psychotic rages. Jason (Damon Albarn, of the pop group Blur) is a youth making his criminal début.

Bird handles the build-up to the raid with fine command of pace and hardware, but current movie convention makes it no surprise when the job goes awry and the robbers find themselves with a lot less than the expected £2 million in the bag. Arguments over the division lead to violence.

Two big shoot-outs, in a quiet Hornsey street and a police station, are choreographed with flair. As a counterpoint, Ronan Bennett's script makes telling use of the villains' habitual irony, delivered with a careful timing familiar from countless TV cop shows. "This is not 'elpful, in the circumstances," Dave observes, lying face-down in a puddle while the maddened Julian menaces him with a sawn-off.

Bird's straightforward political purpose is to show the brutalising and destructive effect of Thatcherism on ordinary people. "Money goes everywhere these days," a crooked cop observes. "There are no public servants, there is no public service. There's just people who have money and people who don't."

Against that can be set the film's biggest defect, its dogged insistence on establishing Ray's internal dilemma by showing us scenes from his past. A Hawks or a Melville would have allowed Carlyle to create the character in the present tense alone, trusting the details of his behaviour to suggest everything we might need to know or to imagine.

The final scene, too, takes such an abrupt turn that it feels like the product of a late rewrite. Its softness deflates us in a way that is by no means the product of a thwarted urge to see the guilty punished. Who are the guilty, anyway? We're with the film-makers there. They've convinced us. But the whole thrust of the movie has propelled us towards a different conclusion, towards something colder and harsher. In the end, Ray isn't the only one who feels betrayed.

Derek Malcolm adds: Adrian Lyne's Lolita, a new version of the Nabokov book which, at the present time, no distributor in America will dare handle, had its world premiere at Spain's San Sebastian Festival without causing riots in the streets. Indeed, the sustained applause with which it was received indicated that no one thought it was a film likely to encourage paedophilia.

It is, however, totally different to Stanley Kubrick's adaptation, much more predicated towards the overt sexuality of the central liaison between the middle-aged Humbert Humbert and the pre-adolescent Lolita.

Instead of James Mason's dirty uncle of a Humbert, we have Jeremy Irons's riven and obsessive lover who knows he is doing wrong but cannot help himself. He is not a natural paedophile. He is a guilty man who in the end destroys both himself and the object of his desire.

IN THIS, Lyne goes even further than Nabokov's book. But in other respects he is totally, almost too literally, faithful to it. Nor is his film exploitative towards its difficult subject matter. It merely admits that grown men can be attracted to the under-aged and attempts to show how and even why.

A lot, of course, depends upon the acting — and here the then 15-year-old Dominique Swain's Lolita contributes one of the most extraordinary and detailed portraits of pre-adolescence I have seen on the screen. She totally carries the day and Irons's performance, carefully underplayed and striking as it is, virtually exists in her shadow.

The main problem with what is undoubtedly the best film the 56-year-old Lyne has made is its length, which at present is two hours, 20 minutes. Somewhere in there, the film loses part of its grip and emotional kick. What it never loses is its sense of danger — of dealing with a taboo subject with honesty and sensitivity.

Shout it out loud

OBITUARY
Jimmy Witherspoon

DURING his long career, Jimmy Witherspoon, who has died aged 74, was described as a blues shouter, a jazz singer and a rhythm 'n' blues hit-maker. He also sang spirituals and standards and was at ease in company as different as the Count Basie orchestra and Eric Burdon's rock group, War. His was a voice of unequalled mellowness, subtlety and warmth.

"Blues to me is happy," he said once. It seems an odd statement from the man who delivered the poignant Ain't Nobody's Business at the 1959 Monterey Jazz Festival. Yet even in his bluest songs he seemed to radiate positive spirit, and at fast tempos he sang with huge bonhomie.

The label "blues shouter" places him among singers like Basie's Jimmy Rushing and Big Joe Turner. Blues shouters are among the vocal athletes of black music, and the best of them, like 'Spoon, can handle any mood from torrid to intimate.

After growing up in southern Arkansas, he moved to California, and during the second world war served in the US merchant marines as a cook. Ashore in Calcutta, he made his public debut with an expatriate orchestra led by the pianist Teddy Weatherford. Until then he had been mimicking the sweet singing style of the Ink Spots. "But that time in Calcutta I was kind of despondent and didn't give a damn what happened. And it was just out of the clear blue, I was half stoned when I did it . . . and everybody went crazy back there when I sang."

Leaving the service, he settled at Vallejo, California, where his club act was caught one night in 1944 by the band-leader Jay McShann. 'Spoon spent three years with McShann, recording for several of the independent labels in California.

He went on to record for Modern, King and Chess, but by the 1950s was no longer producing hits.

In 1959, the promoter Jimmy Lyons, hoping to book 'Spoon for the Monterey Jazz Festival, tracked him down to Newport in Kentucky, where he was reduced to playing bass with the pianist Charles Brown.

Witherspoon: a vocal athlete

In the unforgettable recording of the Monterey event, 'Spoon leaps upon his new opportunity like a lion. Soon afterwards he was recorded again in Hollywood with Ben Webster and Gerry Mulligan. The double calling-card of these two albums introduced him to the international jazz audience, and during the 1960s he appeared at the Newport Jazz Festival, visited Europe and Japan and built an impressive catalogue of albums.

Unlike many artists with blues associations, he was honoured by the African-American community, receiving an NAACP Image Award and a Hall of Fame Award from Ebony magazine.

Around 1981 he was diagnosed with throat cancer. He continued working, but by the end of the decade the velvet of his voice was audibly worn and patchy.

Nevertheless, albums such as Midnight Lady Called The Blues (1986) gave his admirers almost unalloyed satisfaction, thanks partly to sympathetic collaborators, but chiefly to his sheer professionalism. In an idiom where sometimes too much respect is paid to unlettered directness, 'Spoon was a splendid exponent of pure craft.

Tony Russel

Jimmy Witherspoon, singer, born August 8, 1923; died September 18, 1997

Heady stuff . . . Karen Huffstodt's in Valery Gergiev's Salome

Double Dutch

OPERA
Andrew Clements

PERHAPS the grass is always greener on the other side of the North Sea, but the Dutch take on opera comes as a shock after the impoverishment of operatic life in Britain. It is not just a question of funding (despite recent cuts, support is far more generous than it is in Britain). It's attitude: there is a seriousness of purpose that comes across in everything put on there. Too often in Britain, one gets a sense of shows being launched on a wing and a prayer.

At the Muziektheater in Amsterdam, the Netherlands Opera has just embarked on a Ring Cycle, the first to be mounted by a Dutch company. Das Rheingold opened last month, and the remaining instalments will follow in quick succession next year. Complete cycles will be given in summer 1999. It is staged by the company's artistic director, Pierre Audi, and conducted by music director Harmut Haenchen.

If nothing else, the cycle promises to be a visual spectacular, for if ever there was a perfect illustration of conspicuous operatic consumption, it's this Rheingold. George Tsypin's set is a tour de force of massive tectonic plates, which tilt and move to create different spaces for each scene. Girders high on either side of the stage provide extra seating for adventurous opera-goers, and walkways and ramps encircling the orchestra pit project the action into the auditorium. As the cycle progresses, so the relationship between the audience, the orchestra and the stage will be reassessed, until in Götterdämmerung the orchestra will occupy centre stage, and the audience will be all around them.

It's immensely ambitious, and could only be contemplated in a space like the Muziektheater, with its huge stage and state-of-the-art technology. But once the sheer thrill of beholding such a gigantic construction has subsided, there is little else to hold the attention: in the course of two-and-a-half hours nothing really happens. The earth moves, the special effects go off on cue, the characters go through their precisely choreographed motions. There's not a hint of really dramatic involvement or fresh perspective.

This is a Rheingold in which Wotan (sung in a workmanlike way by John Bröcheler) is almost a peripheral figure, Alberich's curse (delivered by Henk Smit) is incidental, and the most powerful performances come from the Mime of Graham Clark and Loge of Chris Merritt, probably because both are experienced singers capable of creating their own definition of their characters. Perhaps with a more inspiring lead from Haenchen the musical results might have been more involving, but this was dry, matter-of-fact Wagner with an orchestra (the Residentie from The Hague) whose lack of familiarity with the music showed all too often.

Meanwhile, in Rotterdam, a whole autumn festival has been built around Valery Gergiev, who divides his time between running the Kirov Opera in St Petersburg and conducting the Rotterdam Philharmonic. The centrepiece this year is a bespoke production of Strauss's Salome in the city's Schouwburg; it is attributed to the Nationale Reisopera, but it is a show of international quality by any standard, conducted incandescently by Gergiev with the Rotterdam Phil in the pit, and with staging by Willi Decker of such intense musicality and emotional power that it overshadows every other version I have ever seen.

IN A functional, stepped set by Wolfgang Gussmann and brilliantly delineated costumes — tinsel crowns and bald heads for Herod and Herodias — Decker makes every moment count, every phrase have meaning and dramatic purpose. No details are overlooked. The suicide of Narraboth, which so often seems almost incidental to the main action, becomes an event of pivotal importance; the Dance of Seven Veils is no teasing come-on, but a ritual humiliation of Herod, while Salome's final scene with the severed head is profoundly disturbing.

The full, nauseating power of the opera is unleashed, and Karen Huffstodt's performance in the title role has intense concentration and unfailing vocal command. There is a magisterial, warm Jokanaan from Nicolai Putilin, a helpless Herod from Konstantin Plosnikov, and a dumpy, frumpy Herodias from Kerstin Witt. And there is Gergiev realising Strauss's orchestral effect with super-real intensity. It is an unforgettable show.

Acuity buried in clutter

THEATRE
Michael Billington

TREVOR NUNN, the new director of the National Theatre in London, opens his account with Ibsen's An Enemy of the People — an extremely bold choice, since the play champions the élite against the masses and questions the tyranny of majority rule. But while the evening has much going for it — not least Christopher Hampton's new version and fine performances from Ian McKellen, Stephen Moore and John Woodvine — I was dismayed by Nunn's reliance on Victorian scenic clutter. Visually, this is old-hat Ibsen.

In fact, there is a gnawing paradox at the heart of this production. Textually, it goes for the real, uncensored play. It is, of course, the story of Dr Stockmann, medical officer in a Norwegian coastal town, who discovers the local baths are dangerously contaminated. In Arthur Miller's highly popular version, Stockmann is turned into an heroic idealist. Hampton's infinitely superior translation reminds us that Stockmann's campaigning courage is allied to a fanatic streak. In the great scene where he confronts the townspeople, who see their livelihoods threatened, he divides humanity into pedigrees and mongrels, hymns the "spiritually superior individual" and claims that "anyone who lives by a lie should be exterminated like vermin". Ibsen's point is that the champion of scientific truth may also be a rabid anti-democrat.

At its best, the play is like a mixture of Coriolanus and Jaws, a portrait of a truculent individualist and of a society that puts profit before human life. However, what Nunn gives us is a variation on Nicholas Nickleby. At a time when the trend in Ibsen production is towards the suggestively spare, he swathes the play in novelistic detail. John Napier's tiresomely revolving, stage-hogging set crowns domestic interiors with water towers, forested hills and scudding clouds; Nunn fills in the crowded canvas with marching bands, jostling citizens and cawing seagulls.

Not only does this subvert Ibsen's selective realism; on several occasions it is misleading. And Nunn's ending is preposterous: Stockmann and his family ascend to the rooftop, striking an heroic, tableau-vivant pose, while below them an electronically enhanced crowd chants: "An enemy of the people." This is Les Mis kitsch, not Ibsen.

Underneath the ludicrously inflated staging, there is, however, a serious grasp of what the play is about — something you can gauge from McKellen's excellently judged performance. Ibsen said that the actor playing Stockman "must make himself as thin and small as possible". And McKellen transforms himself into a lean-faced, straggle-haired, excitable figure whose life is dominated by domesticity and research — almost the epitome of the absent-minded prof. In this fine performance, private postures explain public attitudes: Stockmann's solitary obsessiveness translates into an inflexible aristocracy of spirit.

What you also learn is how much Stockmann is driven by antipathy to his big-wig brother: the scenes between McKellen's impulsive Tomas and Stephen Moore's sly, calculating Peter Stockmann are the highlight of the evening. When Moore quietly asks McKellen to return the mayoral hat and stick with which he has been cavorting, it is as if old nursery antagonisms are being re-played.

Psychologically, the production is acute. There is a brilliant cameo from John Woodvine as a printer who prides himself on having graduated from "the university of life", and a highly impressive one from Alan Cox as an opportunist liberal editor. Ibsen's unnervingly subversive play, which champions a spiritual élite while attacking the capitalist ethic, survives intact; I only hope that Trevor Nunn's monumental scenic realism does not suggest that the National is going to return to Victorian theatrical values.

Do we need theatre companies? Peter Hall passionately believes we do. In a programme article for his King Lear at London's Old Vic he pleads for more permanent troupes. But the real case is made on stage by his strikingly lucid, fast-moving production which offers living proof

The play is like a mix of Coriolanus and Jaws. But Nunn gives us a variation on Nicholas Nickleby

of the practical benefits of ensemble.

One moment sums it up to perfection. In the famous scene on Dover heath, Gloucester's mock-suicide is tragedy transmuted into farce. Other productions, such as Peter Brook's, have pointed up the Beckettian parallels. But here the fact that the blinded, spreadeagled Gloucester and the shape-changing Edgar are played by Denis Quilley and Greg Hicks, Pozzo and Lucky in this season's Godot, strengthen the reverberations. And when they are joined by Alan Howard's wander-witted Lear, Godot's Vladimir, the Shakespeare-Beckett links become uncanny. Hall is not a conceptual director who bends plays to fit a thesis. But if a key point emerges from this highly intelligent Lear — surprisingly his first — it is the constant Beckettian co-existence of the tragic and the absurd.

Lear's suffering, in particular, is counterpointed by the antic comedy of Alan Dobie's Fool: the best I have seen. Like Michael Bryant in Richard Eyre's National Theatre production, Dobie plays him as an old vaudevillian in a comical, conical hat. But Dobie eschews pathos to present a Fool who, even as Lear is confronting madness, is busy doing lewd phallic jokes or ball-juggling. He is also, of course, an ironic commentator on Lear's folly, but what you get is a sense of the grotesque contradiction that is the hallmark of Shakespeare's play.

I wish I could be quite as rhapsodic about Howard's Lear. He makes a strong initial impression. He is imperious, commanding, red-cloaked, handsome and not that old: a Lear who seems to have opted for early retirement. One superb touch, in which the discarded Cordelia hands him his crown so that he can greet France and Burgundy, also instantly establishes his awareness of his folly. But Lear is a role that demands more than good acting. It requires, though not necessarily literally, a degree of self-exposure. And although Howard uses his fine vocal resources to chart Lear's suffering and madness, it remains as yet a striking feat of impersonation rather than a piece of self-revelation.

The strength of the evening lies in the clarity of the staging, on John Gunter's all-but-bare stage, and in the ensemble. Victoria Hamilton's Cordelia beautifully mixes compassion and strength. Anna Carteret's Goneril and Jenny Quayle's Regan are clearly refugees from a world of paternal domination. And David Yelland's Kent and Peter Blythe's Albany show how decency survives in a world of disintegrating evil: one more contradiction in this gloriously senseless play.

This is the third Lear in a year and the best: the one that gets closest to the play's tragi-comic heart and most reminds us of man's Beckettian solitude in a hostile universe.



Ian McKellen, pictured with Kal Pearce, exacts a fine performance in An Enemy Of The People PHOTOGRAPH: NEIL LIBBERT

Stranger than fiction

Libby Brooks meets the novelist least tipped to be shortlisted for this year's Booker Prize

"*ARE YOU* writing down what I've got in my bathroom?" Since her place on the Booker Prize shortlist was announced, Madeleine St John has grown wily about journalistic methods of ascertaining psychological verities. A tiny sparrow of a woman, she wriggles, child-like, in her chair, straining to see out of the window of the cheerfully chaotic flat in Notting Hill, west London, where she has been a fixture since the early seventies. Full lips move in a well-etched face, framed by wiry, once-copper hair. "This is my first face-to-face interview," she says deliberately.

Though rumoured to have been longlisted for the Booker Prize in 1993, St John, aged 55, is stunned at the trajectory of her third novel, The Essence Of The Thing. "I am gob-smacked, truly. I think we'd all like to get attention, but when we've got it we're in a very equivocal position, despising ourselves for wanting it."

First published four years ago, St John's minimalist anatomies of daily dramas have won critical plaudits and gentle sales. Her selection by the Booker judges, however, raised eyebrows in literary circles and she is undoubtedly considered the wild-card choice. "God knows who this creature is who is going to emerge out of all this," she says fretfully. "The only thing I'm sure of is that it won't be me, and it won't be the person who wrote the book."

Born into a wealthy family in Sydney, she studied at Sydney university, but left Australia in 1965, at the age of 23. Was she eager to leave? "Who wouldn't be? Really, there's nothing unusual in leaving Australia. Suddenly one day there was no one left under the age of 35." Marrying as she exited, St John travelled to the United States, where her new husband began graduate studies, while she worked at the university bookstore. Two years


Madeleine St John: gobsmacked

later, she came to England, the plan being for her husband to follow. "But he never actually caught up with me." She laughs. "He got distracted by *une autre femme*, so that was that. And by some oversight, I never managed to meet another Prince Charming to rescue me from the awful responsibility of running my own life."

London subsistence involved a succession of "stupid little part-time jobs", including a stint at a radical bookshop in Charing Cross Road. "It never struck me that I wanted to write. There just came a point in my life when I realised there was nothing else I could do to try to earn a few quid. It wasn't a burning need, which is an awful thing to confess. I thought I'd have a crack at this writing thing. And it's worked out as you've seen."

St John finds it incomprehensible that some might object to women writers who concentrate on the minutiae of daily life: "Though I suspect a lot of women writers are so wet and uninteresting that they give it a bad name." She smirks. "I probably shouldn't have said that." Her own examination of the quotidian has attracted its critics. A savage review described her latest book as "light enough to be spread on Ryvita".

Why are her characters usually two decades younger than herself? "I'm prejudiced against people my age. I don't think their lives are terribly interesting. They're grannies, aren't they? There's nothing pretty about them." Does she apply a similar analysis to herself? "Oh absolutely," she chuckles witchily. "A granny without any grandchildren! Dreadful!" St John has yet to read her Booker competition. Re-reading Austen and James, her favourite authors, leaves little time for contemporary fiction. She'd like to travel more. "Other than that, I'd like to arrive at a point where it's possible to meet my maker with some kind of courage. Once you're getting towards the end of your life, the world is fragile and wonderful and terrible because you know you are going to leave it."

Surely 55 is rather too young for such contemplations. "Do you think so? Maybe I should put it off for a few years. So I do have time to get a dog then."

Booker shortlist

Quarantine by Jim Crace (Viking, £16.99)
Grace Notes by Bernard MacLaverty (Cape, £14.99)
The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy (Flamingo, £15.99)
Europa by Tim Parks (Secker & Warburg, £9.99)
The Essence of the Thing by Madeleine St John (Fourth Estate, £9.99)
The Underground Man by Mick Jackson (Picador, £15.99)

Australian conjuror

Peter Porter

Jack Maggs
by Peter Carey
Faber 328pp £15.99

AMONG continuous critical exchanges about the contemporary novel little is said of plotting and storytelling. It is assumed that such devices are too old-fashioned to be mentioned in decently modern company. Yet the one area where our contemporaries are the equal of their great predecessors is in the way they plan their fictional works.

Peter Carey is a wonderful deviser of gnarled and twisted stories. He began with a fine distillation of the nasty in The Man In History, but it's easy to spring surprises in short stories. Once he settled into his stride in the extended form of the novel, he began to develop an admirable ingenuity of narrative. There was a fault early on in the delta-like fanning out of events: Illywhacker begins and ends brilliantly but sags somewhat in the middle. Oscar And Lucinda is written in the sheaf principle — the story is presented in hundreds of short sections. Much is marvellous but again the exfoliation leads to emotional redundancy. With The Tax Inspector and The Unusual Life Of Tristan Smith, Carey came to full maturity.

Jack Maggs is a further demonstration of Carey's originality as a conjuror of people and happenings. He recognises that we all, Australians included, have grown up knowing Charles Dickens's England almost as we do our own skins. He has chosen to look more closely at the moral and physical make-up of the Dickensian landscape which time and over-familiarity have reduced to a sequence of comic tableaux. He has smelt his way into the terror and obsession which underlie Twist, Nickleby, Dombey, Chuzzlewit and the rest.

His hero, Jack Maggs, is a younger version of Magwitch returned from New South Wales in 1837 intent on claiming revenge on the country of his persecution, but also on being reunited with his protégé, Henry Phipps, who is living a sybaritic and secretive life in London. Maggs's early years encompassed a series of misfortunes and betrayal by almost everybody he trusted. En route to transportation he decided on whim to befriend a poor boy in a Kentish village — Phipps, his adopted son — whom in due course he enriched with money sent back from Sydney.

Maggs's search for Phipps is Carey's opportunity to souse himself in Dickens's world and also to pursue the demon of Dickens himself. By a series of mishaps Maggs becomes a footman in the London house of Percy Buckle, a book-lover anxious to make the wider acquaintance of Tobias Oates, darling of the English reading public. Oates's description comes from the Maclise portrait of Charles Dickens, and he has many of Dickens's renowned characteristics. He is an indefatigable note-taker and journal-keeper, and an omnivorous observer of London life.

However, Carey's real achievement is not to recreate London in the first years of Victoria's reign, nor to graft a fictional outrider on to a tribal understanding of Dickens — rather the novel is a report by hellish half-light of one of the great dreamlands of human obsession.

Carey doesn't rely on any of the tricks of "magic realism" — he pays due homage to naturalism throughout. But he does so audaciously and his interest in people, places, surfaces and customs is of a catalogue-like density.

The novel has a happy ending of Dickensian perfunctoriness back in New South Wales. It's almost as if Carey is signalling that calm and contentment are native to Australia but real life is to be found only in the sprawling cruelty of London. Charles Dickens and Tobias Oates would agree with him.

Intimate portrait of a lady

Laura Cumming

The Magician's Wife
by Brian Moore
Bloomsbury 216pp £15.99

IN 1856, as Napoleon III was congratulating himself on France's victory in the Crimea and languidly anticipating the conquest of Algeria, news came from the Bureau Arabe of a sudden hitch to the imperial plans. In the Southern desert a band of holy men were inciting the Algerians to Islamic jihad. So miraculous were the powers of one of these marabouts that he was thought to be Mohammed's true successor, chosen to lead his people against the infidel. Napoleon could not send his vast exhausted army, so he cunningly dispatched a French magician instead to quell the Arabs with the touch of a wand.

Extravagantly implausible as this seems, the plot of Brian Moore's new novel turns out to be true. Napoleon really did send a conjuror into the Algerian interior, armed only with a box of props, although the man was Europe's greatest magician, an adept who reputedly robbed his victims of their strength and could withstand a bullet to the heart. The hawk-eyed Moore spotted a cursory reference in Flaubert's letters. From this fragment, he has conjured a story even more surprising than the original report.

Henri Lambert is brilliantly sketched — a silent, dapper figure withdrawing fans and flowers, coffee cups and cannon balls from the fragile recesses of a papier mâché horn. But he is neither the narrator nor the subject of this book. Moore's interest is offstage, in the wings where Mme Lambert stands, an unwitting conspirator in the imperial plot.

Emmeline Lambert is a doctor's daughter from rural France. She doesn't know the secrets of Lambert's magic — until Algeria — and no longer understands how he mesmerised her into a marriage of such midwinter despair. We never quite glimpse her except as a radiant reflection in other people's faces.

Moore's pacing is exquisite: short scenes driven forward on undercurrents of political intrigue and the sexual charge between Emmeline and the sun-darkened Colonel who has seduced her husband into the Algerian mission. As Lambert prepares to face the marabouts, the tension ratchets to the limit. If his bullet trick falters, Lambert may prove to be the victim of a hoax.

You might expect a ricochet from religion to politics, especially from a writer who has examined the relationship so brilliantly in novels about Belfast, Warsaw, Haiti and Quebec. Instead, Moore reduces the conflict to caricature. The holy man sent by the colonisers is a scientific materialist whose idea of a miracle is to electrocute the Arabs. The marabout leader is a gentle pacifist, one of Moore's most tenderly spiritual characters. Emmeline scarcely hesitates before telling him the truth. That pivotal moment, quite late in the novel, dramatically alters all that precedes it. The magician is transformed from expert fraud to human husband.

Emmeline's motives, avowedly based on hatred of colonial injustice, suddenly appear more personal and oblique. The narrative darkens; no longer a historical, but a psychological mystery. In the bizarre dénouement, Lambert discovers his potency in courage, not magic.

The Magician's Wife is dense with physical detail, from the porcelain and haute couture at the palace to the construction of candlewax bullets, the proper ingredients of couscous and the irksome friction of taffeta under the red desert sun. History is discreetly expressed by allusion, yet history, as Emmeline says, is also "ordinary people doing their evening shopping in the streets". She may be a distant speck in the imperial story, but she's a vivid close-up in this one.

Moore deftly conveys Emmeline's transformation from timid bride to independent woman in a few heightened instants: the shock of seeing her husband sleeping in a hairnet, the lascivious probing of the emperor's fingers beneath her skirt. The broader themes — fraud, corruption, imperialism — are fused with such moments. Moore overlays the political sophistication of his recent novels with the psychological empathy of his early work. Like The Doctor's Wife or The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne, this novel is the intimately nuanced portrait of a lady.

Edward Hopper's A Woman In The Sun (1961), reminiscent of a Renaissance Annunciation

Images that defied the Word

Peter Conrad

American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America
by Robert Hughes
Harvill 608pp £35

AMERICA — which has become a factory of images, a society of hype and photo-ops peopled by self-advertisers with braced teeth and buffed bodies — was founded, oddly enough, by a sect of fanatical iconophobes. The Puritans who settled its abstemious northeastern corner in the 17th century venerated the legalism of the Word but mistrusted the image as a sensual delusion, and their eschatological doubts still linger.

In 1910, Robert Henri, inculcating a grimy, gritty realism at the New York School of Art, claimed that "in this country we have no need of art as a culture". In 1927, the painter Charles Demuth told Alfred Stieglitz, the priestly impresario who introduced modern art to New York, that "America doesn't really care". Today, the demagogic bigot Jesse Helms, fulminating against the obscenity of Mapplethorpe's photographs and rallying Congress to deny funds to the National Endowment for the Arts, sustains the philistine faith of his ancestors.

Despite its triumphal subtitle, Robert Hughes's book — expanded from his recent television series — reveals that the history of art in America has been something less than an epic progress. At first, art had to defend itself against the image-haters. The Puritans of New England, preferring plain utility to beauty, contented themselves with storage chests of sawn pine. The Shakers constructed spare, rectilinear furniture, believing the square to be a symbol of probity. In Pennsylvania, the parsimonious Amish community sewed scraps of cloth together into sober geometrical quilts and, as Hughes comments, "created America's first major abstract art".

Nowadays, there is another ideological malaise to contend with: how can good art be made in a society which boosts all of its members as potential creators, and defines even their bodily effluents as art works? Near the end of his life, Andy Warhol decided that it might be "neat" to oxidise his canvases by pissing on them, and Hughes comments testily on the "performance art" of Karen Finley, who anoints herself with chocolate and intromits yams "to illustrate the degradation of women in American society".

Julian Schnabel acquired a reputation by breaking crockery against his mucky canvases, while Keith Haring turned graffiti into a lucrative franchise operation. Any act of in-your-face effrontery can now be touted as art, since, as Hughes points out, the art market itself — with its supremely fictional prices — "became the chief cultural artefact of the 1980s".

Henri encouraged Americans to "learn the means of expressing themselves". But that self-expression has usually taken an iconoclastic form. In Tom Sawyer, Mark Twain describes the arduous task of painting America: the novel begins with the whitewashing of a board fence, 30 metres long and 3m high. Jackson Pollock reverted to even cruder origins when he spread his canvases on the floor and threw paint at them. His technique, he thought, revived the habits of the Indian sand painters of the West, who first imprinted images on the friable, ephemeral American earth.

Crossing the ocean, imported European emblems underwent translation into the vernacular. The architect Latrobe, who designed the neoclassical public buildings of Philadelphia and Washington, used corn cobs to decorate his capitals and replaced the acanthus leaves of traditional Corinthian columns with the leaves and flowers of the tobacco plant. William Van Alen, designing the Chrysler Building in New York in the twenties, girdled it with aquiline gargoyles made from stainless-steel Chrysler radiator caps.

Hughes writes endearingly about this home-made, unpretentious strain in American art, and its affront to the refinements of Europe. He finds it first in John Singleton Copley's portraits of the 1776 revolutionaries, which take inventory of the sturdy, substantial world of mercantile possessions, and identifies it again in John James Audubon's obsessively factual studies of birds which have become "a touchstone of American sensibility".

In the same spirit, Thomas Eakins painted rowers on their sculls on the Schuylkill or yacht races on the Delaware River. Looking at those buoyant gadgets, Eakins remarked with laconic admiration, "It requires a heap of thinking and calculating to build a boat."

Marsden Hartley collected flotsam on Maine beaches as tokens of what he called "nativeness"; and the sculptor David Smith, descended from a blacksmith, learned how to construct his rusty monoliths by scavenging industrial detritus along the railway lines of his home town in Indiana. Perhaps American nature, savagely sublime, constitutes the country's greatest work of art: hence the segregation of wilderness areas as national parks — open-air museums in which the exhibits have been painted or sculpted by God Himself.

Hughes acclaims the Whitmanesque gospel of artists such as Eakins, who wanted to reach "the heart of a . . . nonspecialist audience with plain visual truths", and he shares their levelling faith, since his history is addressed to "that creature who, American academics often profess to believe, no longer exists; the general intelligent reader".

His judgments are partisan, his style often saltily colloquial. He calls the heiress Mabel Dodge "the Miss Piggy of the American avant-garde", adding that she was "an intolerable bitch", and dismisses the existential bravado of the abstract expressionists as "bullshit empty depth".

After 25 years in New York, Hughes defiantly retains his Australian passport. Even so, his loud, large, multitudinous book is, as the poet William Carlos Williams would have said, "in the American grain".

If you would like to order American Visions at the special price of £30, contact CultureShop (see advert left)

Paperbacks Nicholas Lezard

Life's Grandeur, by Stephen Jay Gould (Vintage, £7.99)

AS I AM sure you all know by now, a billion years of evolution have conspired to produce the perfect organism, that model of higher consciousness known as humanity. I mean, look at Tony Blair. Wrong! Hopelessly, delusionally wrong, and this book tells us why. Gould starts with the conundrum: why is it most improbable that a professional American baseball player will ever again achieve an average of 0.400? I cannot say that this is a question that has ever bothered me, but apparently it has deep implications for the understanding of evolution.

Another example he uses: "The overall directionality in certain kinds of random motion . . . can best be illustrated by a paradigm known as 'the drunkard's walk'." I'll leave it to you to find out how he gets from this to the principle that evolution does not mean progress. As so often turns out to be the case, Darwin got there first: "I cannot avoid the conviction that no innate tendency to progressive development exists," he wrote in 1872, and so our continuing hazy acceptance of the notion that it does is all the more remarkable a monument to our own inability to see things in perspective. A great, mind-expanding achievement.

The Fall of Paris, by Alistair Horne (Papermac, £10)

WOULD have been pick of the week if it had not originally appeared in 1965. It's the history of the Prussian siege of Paris and the subsequent Commune of 1870-71, written with a freshness and immediacy that make the events described extraordinarily vivid — and changed my position from one of utter ignorance to passionate involvement within the space of a few paragraphs. "To the average person today, the Siege of Paris evokes principally two images: rat-eating and balloons." Actually, they didn't eat that many rats — but you can find out how many they did eat if you want.

Latin Can Be Fun, by Georg Capellanus, trs Peter Needham (Souvenir Press, £7.99)

A MOST debatable proposition if I may say so. If you think learning the Latin for "my children play table tennis" ("*liberi mei manubriato reticulo pilulaque in mensa ludunt*") is fun, then off you go. I cannot help thinking of the Latin Play in How To Be Topp: "CORTICUS: Eheu! (*The headmaster and all lat. masters who watch roar with larffter.*) RADIX: Eheu! (*More larffter they are in stiches*)", etc. *Rem acu tetigisti*, Molesworth, if I may say so.

The Equitable Schools Book 1998, ed Klaus Boehm and Jenny Lees-Spalding (Bloomsbury, £15.99)

NEARLY 800 pages of private schools which you can send little Timmy to if you are terrified of sending him to St Crack's down the road. All the entries seem to describe schools set in Arcadia and any notion that private education is anything but equitable is invisible. I am again reminded of Molesworth: "As i sa i am down for GRUNTS wizz wow which is an ancient foundation and full of boys to whom masters hav said You'll never pass the CE molesworth never. But they pass into GRUNTS all right which receive them with open arms." Revolting.

A monumental dilemma

Mark Cocker

THE BURREN region of northern County Clare in Ireland is an area of exposed limestone upland that is famous internationally for its extraordinary abundance of wild flowers. To witness this hauntingly beautiful, almost skeletal, landscape is to realise what the flora of western Europe might have been like before the advent of chemical herbicides.

The Burren is also extremely rich in Neolithic remains. Maps of the area are covered with red circles indicating the sites of forts, tombs, stone cairns and megaliths. Few of them are named and even fewer have been thoroughly excavated.

In fact, one of the pleasures of the Burren is the way that these ancient structures are so casually embedded within the living rural environment. There's no self-conscious separation of cultural artefact from the present workaday elements of Burren life. Many of the sites are still on private land. On top of one 4,000-year-old wedge tomb, a farmer had planted a flag with the colours of his local hurling side, as if to suggest the historical depth of his team's support. Other tombs have been incorporated into drystone walls. You can wander around 1,500-year-old forts and the only other figure visible in the landscape is the local farmer on his tractor.

Poulnabrone, however, is in a different category. This is one of only two portal dolmens in the Burren. It is also one of the oldest and most spectacular megaliths, believed to date from 3400 BC and with a soaring capstone that alone weighs over five tonnes. Not surprisingly, it is the most widely recognised symbol of the Burren, reproduced in endless postcards and arguably the most photographed of all Ireland's ancient structures.

Although it stands on private land it is now firmly established on the regular tourist circuit. Full-sized coaches squeeze down the Burren's narrow lanes and visitors flock to have themselves photographed in front of a structure which is older than England's Stonehenge or the Great Pyramid of Cheops.



ILLUSTRATION: ANN HOBDAY

We also found that others had taken to making a more permanent record of their visit. Beyond the dolmen was an area of limestone pavement, itself a rare and compelling natural habitat, where people were ripping up rocks to construct their own version of Poulnabrone. Some of the structures were highly imaginative. Others looked like the product of considerable effort. Stones that must have weighed over 100kg had been levered upright by some determined builders. But there are now so many hundreds, if not thousands, of these mini dolmens they seem to trigger a Pavlovian response in subsequent visitors. See the real thing; now build your own.

Affairs at Poulnabrone raise critical questions about all sites of this nature. Should ancient artefacts become untouchable cultural monuments, preserved for posterity at any cost? At Stonehenge a controlling regime of car parks, barrier fences, official signs and enforced routes has drained the site of its numinous power.

At Poulnabrone the issue is reversed. The lack of restrictions has allowed people to respond freely and, perhaps, more immediately to the presence of this magical creation and the deeply spiritual motive forces that built it. But should anything be done about it? The answer lies in the way you frame another question. Are their do-it-yourself dolmens a genuine if clumsy way of establishing contact with the original builders and of celebrating their achievement? Or are they just jarring and intrusive heaps of rock piled together by thoughtless tourists — a type of graffiti in stone that violates Poulnabrone's integrity?

Chess Leonard Barden

IT TAKES **something special to unite chess grandmasters in a formal protest, but Fide, the international chess federation, has managed it by announcing that Anatoly Karpov stands to win half a million pounds without pushing a pawn at the world championship knock-out in December. The original idea was that Karpov, the Fide champion, and Garry Kasparov, the PCA champion, would be seeded into the semi-finals of the 100-player event where Nigel Short, Michael Adams and Matthew Sadler will represent Britain.**

When Kasparov refused to recognise the championship, Fide seeded Karpov to the final, to the dismay of rivals who will have to compete in two-game mini-matches with a high risk of upset results. A GM petition to Fide urges that Karpov should start in round three along with the other top seeds.

Karpov has been in poor form since he defended his title against Kamsky a year ago, and the GMs believe that, if anybody deserves special status, it is Anand and Kramnik, who have won several recent big tournaments and are among the protest signatories. Player power is a growing factor, so my guess is that Fide will cave in, even if this provokes Karpov's withdrawal.

● Half the players in the MCCU centenary at Staffordshire university last month were locals, but it proved a strong and competitive tournament. There was a home victory when Leicester's Mark Hebden took first prize.

The Midlanders like to disparage their own opening systems with downmarket names such as the Speckled Egg, the 150 Attack (supposedly designed for low-graded opponents) and the Barry Attack (shown in this week's game), but don't be fooled: these offbeat weapons have a fine record in practical play.

Hebden-Buckley

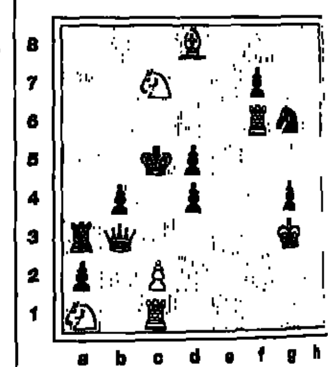
1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 g6 3 Nc3 The key move of the Barry Attack — by not advancing c2-c4, White avoids the main lines of the King's Indian and Grunfeld defences.

d5 4 Bf4 Bg7 5 e3 0-0 6 Be2 c5 7 Ne5 Nc6 8 0-0 Qa5 9 Qd2 Nd7 10 Nf3 White's early plan is fast development and few exchanges. The best reply is Nf6, inviting repeated moves and a draw, but Black's next three turns are passive and concede the dark squares.

e6 11 Rfd1 a6 12 a3 Rd8 13 Bd6 c4 14 b4! This creeping Q-side pawn advance is also typical of the Speckled Egg. The b4 pawn aids the bishop in gaining a stranglehold on the dark squares. **cxb3 15 cxb3 Qb6 16 Bf4 Qa7** If Qxb3? 17 Rdb1 traps the queen.

17 Bc7 Re8 18 Rac1 Ne7 19 Bd3 b5 20 Bd6 Bb7 21 a4! White opens up another front to exploit the huddled defenders. **Nc8 22 Bb4 bxa4 23 Nxa4 Rb8 24 Rc7 Ncb6 25 Nxb6 Nxb6 26 Bc5 Rec8 27 Qa5!** Resigns. If Rxc7 28 Bxb6 wins a piece.

No 2492



White mates in two moves, against any defence (by K Hannemann). This week's problem looks trivial, but it caught out more than half the finalists in a British Solving Championship.

No 2491: 1 Ng6 Kg4 2 Nf2+ and 3 Rc5 mate.

Quick crossword no. 386

Across

1 Said goodbye (4,4,5)
8 Take out (7)
9 Encourage (5)
10 Wandering minstrel (4)
11 Relieve (of worry) (8)
13 One of the Queen's sons (6)
14 Container — ship (6)
17 Shell-firing gun (8)
19 Supply — a sum of money (4)
21 Strict non-meat eater (5)
22 Sudden inclination to act (7)
24 Edward Lear's speciality (8,5)

Down

1 Small peg supporting golf ball (3)
2 Get too big for (7)
3 Glassy gemstone (4)
4 Consuming (6)
5 Workmen (8)
6 Shun (5)
7 Twisted together — and gentle (anag) (9)
10 Composer of Moonlight Sonata (9)
12 Simulation (8)
15 Filth (7)
16 Careless (6)
18 Railway truck (5)
20 Flashy black-market hawker (4)
23 Watch (3)

Last week's solution

Bridge Zia Mahmood

I'VE BEEN playing duplicate bridge for more than 20 years, but I confess that, until now, I haven't known the answer to these questions: What is the largest IMP swing that it is possible to obtain on a single deal? And how many aggregate points must your team score to gain it? The answers are that you can score 24 IMPs on a single deal, but since your team needs to score 4,000 or more aggregate points to achieve this, you might think it would occur in actual play once every blue moon.

At the Grand National Teams in Albuquerque, New Mexico, this year, these cards were dealt in an expert match. Game all, dealer West:

North
♠ None
♥ A54
♦ AKQJ1087
♣ Q85

West
♠ KJ1065332
♥ 872
♦ 4
♣ 96

East
♠ AQ9874
♥ J109
♦ 3
♣ 743

South
♠ None
♥ KQ63
♦ 9652
♣ AKJ102

As you'd expect when one side has a 13-card fit, the bidding was fast and furious. At one table, the auction went like this:

South	West	North	East
	3♠	5♦	6♠
7♦	Dble	Pass	Pass
Pass			

West's double of seven diamonds may appear bizarre — after all, what trick could he hope to take? But some experts play a convention called the "forcing pass", which West believed would apply at his second turn to bid. The theory is that when your side has voluntarily bid a slam, and the opponents then sacrifice over it, you may make a "forcing pass", which invites your partner to bid on to the grand slam and which promises first-round control of the enemy suit. Without this control, you must double.

Here, West thought that East's bid of six spades was genuine, and that South's seven diamonds was a sacrifice, so he doubled because he could not control the first round of diamonds. East did not see matters in the same light, so he passed. North had no trouble in taking all the tricks, and North-South scored 2,330. "Another convention used, another convention misused," as Rixi Markus was fond of saying. At the other table, the bidding was:

South	West	North	East
	2♠(1)	Dble	4♠
5♠	Pass	7♦	7♠
Pass(2)	Pass	7NT!	Dble
Pass	Pass	Pass	

(1) A weak two bid.
(2) Since it was clear at this table that the hand belonged to North-South, this was a forcing pass — but it was a pretty remarkable one.

South believed that for his jump to seven diamonds, North must have first-round control of spades. Unable to believe that his opponents had all 13 of the suit, South placed North with the ace of spades. North, for much the same reasons, placed South with that card. The result was unfortunate.

East doubled, led the ace of spades, and announced six down. "No," said West, "seven down!" He was right, of course, so East-West scored 2,000 in this room to go with 2,330 in the other, for the maximum possible swing of 24 IMPs. Outside, over Albuquerque, the moon shone blue in the night sky.

Motor Racing Luxembourg Grand Prix

Brotherly shove hits Schumacher

Alan Henry at the Nürburgring

JACQUES Villeneuve took a decisive stride towards the world championship here last Sunday when his closest rival Michael Schumacher was to all intents put out of the race by his brother Ralf in the dash from the grid.

The Canadian, who started the race a point behind Schumacher, ran on to a cautiously judged victory in the Luxembourg Grand Prix while the German could only look on. Barely 200 metres from the start his Ferrari's right front suspension was savaged by the out-of-control Jordan of his brother, who had in turn bounced off his team-mate Giancarlo Fisichella. The younger Schumacher got off lightly with an official reprimand.

While the Jordan drivers were left to abandon their cars in the gravel trap, Schumacher's Ferrari lasted only two laps before stopping at the pits to retire.

The McLaren-Mercedes of Mika Hakkinen and David Coulthard initially dominated a processional race in commanding style but they were forced to stop with engine failures on laps 44 and 43 respectively in this 67-lap race.

Villeneuve himself survived a brush — with his team-mate Heinz-Harald Frentzen — on the sprint to the first corner and eventually crossed the line 11.7 seconds ahead of Jean Alesi's Benetton, with Frentzen and Gerhard Berger's Benetton rounding off a decisive 1-2-3-4 grand slam for Renault-engined cars on Mercedes' home turf.

This victory leaves Villeneuve — in his Williams-Renault — nine points ahead of Schumacher in the battle for the championship with only two races and 20 points remaining. Even so, he regarded himself as lucky to scrape home with a win.

"After the bump with Frentzen I was worried because these cars aren't very strong when it comes to banging wheels with each other," he said. Behind Berger, Brazil's Pedro Diniz drove an excellent race in his Arrows-Yamaha to take fifth place, fending off a strong challenge from Olivier Panis's Prost, the Frenchman marking his return to racing with the final point of the afternoon.

Johnny Herbert's Sauber was seventh, ahead of Damon Hill's Arrows, the world champion losing an almost certain top-six finish when, to his embarrassment, he stalled on lap 36 during his sole refuelling stop.

Ralf Schumacher's Jordan in mid-air after the crash PHOTO: MIKE COOPER

Tennis Grand Slam Cup

Rich cup with poor following

Stephen Bierley in Munich

NEITHER the brilliance of Pete Sampras nor the size of his winning cheque — a cool $2 million — could disguise the continuing shortcomings of the Grand Slam Cup in its current format. It is overloaded with money but seriously underwhelms the public.

"Come back next year and bring a few friends," said Australia's Pat Rafter after being beaten 6-2, 6-4, 7-5 in last Sunday's one-sided final. It seems unlikely, however, that many will.

The Munich public are quite prepared to support Boris Becker but he was knocked out in the first round by Sweden's Jonas Bjorkman, and thereafter attendances tailed off.

Rafter, the new US Open champion, was patently knackered after a marathon semi-final victory lasting more than four hours against Petr Korda the day before.

Rafter's service power was down a third on normal, while Sampras lost only eight points on his own serve throughout. The Australian would not admit to fatigue but Sampras recognised it.

This was the second time in consecutive Sundays that Rafter has lost to Sampras. The world No 1 beat him in the Davis Cup semi-final, when Rafter managed to take the first set, but here Sampras completely overwhelmed him.

Greg Rusedski, who lost to Sampras in the semi-final, revealed later that he had parted company with his Californian coach Brian Teacher, the man who lifted him from No 84 in the world this time last year to his current world No 10 and British No 1 spots.

Tony Pickard, the former coach of Sweden's Stefan Edberg, has already slipped into Teacher's shoes, advising Rusedski during the tournament, which earned the US Open finalist $425,000.

"I've been on the phone to him every day since I've been here," said Rusedski. "He's been doing all my strategy."

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Land speed record set at 714mph

A BRITISH team shattered the world land speed record with an average 714mph. The Thrust supersonic car, powered by two Rolls-Royce Spey 205 engines designed for RAF Phantom fighters and driven by RAF pilot Squadron Leader Andy Green, clocked up 700mph in Nevada's Black Rock desert. Then, in the second run, necessary for the record to be declared official, the vehicle recorded a speed of 728mph, easily surpassing the previous mark of 633mph.

After six years of hard work and an investment of nearly $8 million, the team was delighted with the result. The Queen sent her congratulations, saying the achievement was "a source of great pride for the nation". The team's next target: breaking the sound barrier at 750mph.

ITALIAN footballer Fabrizio Ravanelli's turbulent relationship with Middlesbrough finally ended when he agreed to join Olympique Marseille last week after the French First Division club settled on an $8 million fee with the Teesside club, who lost $3.2 million on the temperamental player they signed from Juventus just over a year ago.

AUSTRALIAN motor-cyclist Mick Doohan's 10-race unbeaten run came to an end when he was pipped by Honda team-mate Tadayuki Okada of Japan in the 500cc Indonesian Grand Prix in Jakarta last Sunday. Okada went into the lead on the last of the 30 laps and finished just 0.069sec ahead of the world champion. It was the Japanese rider's first grand prix victory. Alex Criville of Spain came third.

KEVIN KEEGAN, who quit football in January when he was coach of Premiership's high-flyers Newcastle United, staged a comeback last week — as chief operating officer at Fulham with a 5 per cent share in the Second Division club. Fulham's billionaire owner Mohamed Al Fayed has coaxed him back into the game to transform the fortunes of the side. Al Fayed, owner of Harrods, believes that only a high-profile and respected football figure such as Keegan can deliver the goods he ordered when he took over Fulham in May: Premiership football inside three seasons — "the Manchester United of the south".





Keegan . . . back in football

After leaving Newcastle, Keegan said he had nothing to prove in returning to management, but recently he publicly admitted for the first time that he might come back if given the right opportunity. Joining him at Fulham will be Ray Wilkins, former coach at Crystal Palace, who takes over as manager.

DAVID GILBERT, Surrey's Australian cricket coach, is leaving the highly successful county to join Sussex, one of the weakest in the country. The move, which took many by surprise, will enable the former Test fast bowler to fulfil his ambition to quit coaching and take up administration. Surrey were unable to accommodate the 36-year-old in such a role. Under Gilbert, Surrey won the Sunday League last year and the Benson & Hedges Cup in July.

ALEX ZULLE, the 29-year-old Swiss cyclist, wrapped up his second successive win in the 2,500-mile Tour of Spain. Fernando Escartin of Spain was second and Laurent Dufaux, also from Switzerland, finished third. Zulle, who is to defend his world time-trial title in San Sebastian later this month, has signed a contract with Festina Watches where his salary of more than $7 million over three years will make him the world's highest-paid cyclist.

Football Results

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP:
Aston Villa 2, Sheff Wed 2; Barnsley 0, Leicester 2; Blackburn 0, Coventry 0; Chelsea 1, Newcastle Utd 0, Crystal Palace 2, Bolton 2; Derby 4, Southampton 0; Everton 2, Arsenal 2; Leeds Utd 1 Man Utd 0; Tottenham 0, Wimbledon 0; West Ham Utd 2, Liverpool 1.

NATIONWIDE LEAGUE:
Division One:
Bury 1, WBA 3; Charlton 1, Stockport 3; Crewe 2, Tranmere 1; Man City 6, Swindon 0; Nottm For 1, Stoke 0; Oxford 0, Bradford 0; Portsmth 0, Reading 2; Port Vale 2, QPR 0; Sheff Utd 0, Birminghm 0; Sunderland 1, Middlesbro 2; Wolves 1, Huddersfld [illegible]

Division Two:
Blackpool 3, Southend 0; Bournemth 0, Grimsby 1; Brentford 2, Burnley 1; Bristol City 3, Luton 0; Carlisle 2, Gillingham 1; Northmptn 2, Millwall 0; Oldham 4, Bristol R 4; Plymouth 2, Walsall 1; Watford 1, York 1; Wigan 2, Fulham 1; Wrexham 0, Chesterfld 0; Wycombe 0, Preston 0.

Division Three:
Barnet 0, Lincoln 0; Brighton 2, Rochdale 1; Cambridge 2, Cardiff 2; Colchester 1, Exeter 2; Darlington 0, Mansfield 0; Hartlepool 2, Shrewsbry 1; Macclesfld 1, Peterboro 1; Rotherham 4, Chester 2; Scarboro 1, Notts Co 2; Scunthorpe 2, Hull 0; Swansea 1, Leyton Orient 1; Torquay 2, Doncaster 0.

BELLS SCOTTISH LEAGUE:
Premier Division:
Aberdeen 1, Dunfmline 2; Dundee United 1, Celtic 2; Hibernian 1, St Johnstn 1; Kilmarnock 0, Hearts 3; Rangers 2, Motherwell 2.

First Division:
Airdrie 1, Ayr 0; Morton 0, Dundee 2; Hamilton 3, Stirling A 2; Raith 2, Falkirk 0; St Mirren 1, Partick 0.

Second Division:
Brechin 0, Queen Sth 3; Livingston 0, Clydebank 0; Stenhsmr 1, Forfar 4, Stranraer 3, East Fife 2; Inverness 1, Clyde 2.

Third Division:
Alloa 3, Arbroath 0; Berwick 2, E Stirling 3; Cowdnbth 1, Albion 4; Dumbarton 0, Queens Pk 0; Montrose 3, Ross Co 4.

Rugby League

Farrell on a double high as Wigan win

Andy Wilson at Old Trafford

WIGAN took revenge for their Challenge Cup defeat by St Helens earlier in the season with a 33-20 victory in the Premiership final here last Sunday.

And so the most turbulent season in Wigan's history came to an end in familiar style, Andy Farrell lifting the Premiership Trophy for the second year in a row, extending his club's run of victories here to four in succession and five in six years.

Farrell, whose form never dipped even when the club's various off-field crises took their toll earlier in the season, also retained the Harry Sunderland Trophy as Man of the Match, laying on both of Wigan's first-half tries with intelligent kicks, making the break for the third, which extended their lead to 13 points soon after the interval, and backing up Kris Radlinski to score the fourth, to take them out of reach.

There were also six goals from nine attempts, two from the touchline, in a performance outstanding even by Farrell's lofty standards.

The watching Hunter Mariners, who are due to play Wigan at Central Park later in the week in the World Club Championship quarter-finals, must have been impressed. But worryingly for Wigan, Gary Connolly limped off in the first half with an Achilles tendon injury which must make him extremely doubtful.

At half-time Saints had every reason to feel quietly confident. Although Wigan had enjoyed most of the play, they had managed only those two Farrell-inspired tries, from Andy Johnson and Jason Robinson, each after the captain had had the vision to spot a gap behind the defence.

They had replied with scores from Derek McVey, put through by the scrum-half Sean Long, twisting over in Robinson's cover tackle, and Paul Newlove after a marvellous dummy-half run from Keiron Cunningham to cut the deficit to 14-8.

Saints made it 14-10 soon after the break with a Long penalty, but Farrell replied after Cunningham had interfered at a play-the-ball. Connolly's replacement Nigel Wright dropped an insurance goal and then Farrell stormed through Karle Hammond's attempted tackle to set up the position for Radlinski's game-breaking try.

Simon Haughton, Farrell's closest rival for the individual award, was a deserving scorer of Wigan's fifth try while Saints' consolations, from Hammond and Chris Morley, were also merited.

The frustrated Newlove was put on report after collaring Robinson late on but he was subsequently cleared and will now fly out to Queensland with Saints for their daunting match against the Brisbane Broncos on Saturday.

